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From the Editor

The large bulge in recent American demographics, known as the Baby Boom generation, is experiencing adult children and often grandchildren. Christian parents in that generation often fret over their adult children because they often stray from our faith or at least from some of our values and ways of life. Gerry Malkus encourages us to trust God's work in their lives in his uniquely helpful article, "God's Work in Our Adult Children's Lives." This challenge presents an opportunity to trust that our God is both living and sovereign.

Danny Olinger gives us the third chapter of *The Writings of Meredith G. Kline on the Book of Revelation*: Chapter 3 – "The First Resurrection: A Reaffirmation" (1976). His discovery of Meredith G. Kline's 1946 ThM thesis in the Montgomery Library of Westminster Theological Seminary led to his development of Kline's work on Revelation. Then he found that Kline's son, Meredith M., had three copies of the thesis, one of which is a handwritten version containing several penciled notes. It was in an envelope with MGK's notes from Stonehouse's course on Revelation which he took in the Fall 1945 semester of Westminster Theological Seminary. According to his 1946 datebook, he took the exam for the course on January 10, 1946, started research for the paper the next week, and finished it on April 12, 1946.

The second copy is a blue-ink mimeographed version. It has a variety of penciled notes and subheadings related to the text, along with other notes, such as "skip," which must have applied to a presentation MGK made of the material in the paper. It must have been produced from the handwritten version since it alone shares five spelling mistakes with that version.

The third copy is a black-ink mimeographed version. This version has many more spelling mistakes than the other versions and even leaves out several lines. Unlike the other two versions, which have only the title at the beginning of the paper, the first page of this version has a heading above the title: "class notes—unpublished material—class notes" and under the title an indication of authorship: "by Meredith Kline."

Capitalization, punctuation, bibliographical references, and formatting have been updated to provide clarity. The thesis used the KJV for biblical quotations.

So, I will publish Meredith G. Kline, *A Study in the Structure of the Revelation of John*, in four parts, beginning with Part 1 in this issue. Kline's brilliant organization, attention to detail, originality, and strict exegesis immediately impress the reader. I hope that this careful defense of the synchronous structure of Revelation will benefit our

readers.

Alan Strange continues his “Commentary on the Form of Government of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church” with chapter 21. When complete this will be published as a unique resource for church officers. Sessions should encourage its officers and the interns, who are under care or licensed, to pay careful attention to the exposition of our standards.

There is no topic besides gender and the pandemic that is more discussed than race. Darryl Hart reviews Jemar Tisby’s latest book, *How to Fight Racism: Courageous Christianity and the Journey toward Racial Justice*.

In “The Race Card in a Marked Deck,” I review a new book by French political philosopher Pascal Bruckner, *An Imaginary Racism: Islamophobia and Guilt*. Bruckner deals with racism in the European context dealing with Islam.

Christianity seeks its unity broadly in the *imago Dei*, narrowly in the mediatorial person and work of Jesus Christ, while respecting God-given cultural uniqueness, provided that uniqueness is not contrary to biblical orthodoxy. Differences need a solid common foundation.

Mark Graham reviews the latest edition of Richard Gamble’s *The Great Tradition: Classic Readings on What it Means to be an Educated Human Being*. I chose to have this book reviewed as part of a reminder that our Form of Government requires a liberal education of its ministers because we minister the gospel in God’s world. Princeton Theological Seminary is purposely embedded in a university.

William Edgar reviews *The Good, the True, the Beautiful: A Multidisciplinary Tribute to Dr. David K. Naugle*, demonstrating in the life of a great teacher how the religion of the Bible relates to all of life.

Finally, do not miss the lovely poem, “A Hymn to the Evening” by Phillis Wheatley, the first published black poet in America. Nothing in God’s world escaped her worshipful attention.

The cover pictures are from the Eccardt Farm in East Washington, New Hampshire. The OS page and PDF picture is of a stream running through the farm; the front cover picture is of antique farm equipment on display on the roof of the bird house. Still a family farm, the German-Swiss Eccardts love to have children visit their animals and museum.

Blessings in the Lamb,
Gregory Edward Reynolds

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Ordained Servant exists to help encourage, inform, and equip church officers for faithful, effective, and God-glorifying ministry in the visible church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Its primary audience is ministers, elders, and deacons of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, as well as interested officers from other Presbyterian and Reformed churches. Through high-quality editorials, articles, and book reviews, we will endeavor to stimulate clear thinking and the consistent practice of historic, confessional Presbyterianism.

ServantLiving

God’s Work in Our Adult Children’s Lives

By Gerald P. Malkus

“Robbie, I’m done!”

Some statements one never forgets. These words came from a friend, an elder of the church, but most importantly from a loving parent. He had made all the normal efforts, and had gone beyond the normal, all with the desire to bring his youngest son to submission and to the faith. He told me of that encounter when he said, “Robbie, I’m done.” But the full paragraph was the most important part. He went on to tell his son,

> I have tried, I have taught, I have disciplined, but now I must tell you that I am putting you into the hands of God, and you will have to deal with him. But be assured that as you answer to him, you will not be able to say, “I didn’t know, no one told me.”

In my friend’s mind, these were loving words and provided him with the greatest hope for the life of his son.

Perhaps the greatest trial for any Christian parent lies right here. For it is with anguish of heart that a parent comes to a pastor and recounts how their adult child has departed from the path of the Christian faith. Parents bring up a child with a conscientious effort to establish and reinforce the faith in the home by faithful attendance and participation in a church, in corporate worship, Sabbath school, youth groups, camps, and even Christian school. This was truly one of those “good kids.” He, or she, made a credible profession of faith, participated in youth groups, helped out in Bible School, and was a counselor at summer camp. But now, sadly, without warning or maybe over time, at college, in the work force, with new friends, even in marriage, this “good kid” has rejected Christ and the Christian faith and practice.

The cry comes from countless parents, “What can I do now?”

This is a broad subject with countless variations in detail and circumstance. I cannot address every aspect of the problem in one article. My hope is to encourage the reader who identifies with the struggle by reminding us together how it is that God can work in the lives of our adult children.

I begin by addressing what I might call “the elephant in the room”—baptism.

I would submit that the starting point of the anguish of a Reformed Christian parent is that when we bring our children before the church to be baptized, we do so based on this fundamental covenant promise of God: “I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, *to be God to you and to your offspring after you*” (Gen. 17:7, emphasis added).

We have diligently considered those baptismal vows to affirm that our children are holy subjects of God’s covenant of grace. We have taught them, not perfectly, but truly,

the principle of the holy Christian faith. We have prayed for them and with them and endeavored to rear them in the nurture and discipline of the Lord. These are the phrases used in the explanation of the sacrament. And in our hearts we took those vows, understanding they are attached to promises—not our promises, but the promises of God.

None of that was faulty or out of place. And, frankly, it is those vows and promises that form the firm foundation for everything from the beginning and going forward as parents. The seed of God's Word is planted; they have been in the presence of God, worshipping with God's people. The Lord Jesus of all salvation has been held up before them as the only hope for sinners. Still, they have wandered. Is this baptism deficient? No, the Lord's sacrament is never at fault. Allow me to briefly think with the reader about baptism.

When the sign and seal of baptism is placed on a child, we do not believe that the sacrament bestows the saving grace of God to the child. To be certain, that bit of water does signify union with Christ and membership in his Body. It is the certification by God that salvation is never found outside of that union.

At the same time, for children or baptized adults, we may never divorce a trust in God's covenant mercies from the discharge of the obligations of the covenant relationship. Professor John Murray wrote, "Covenant privilege always entails covenant responsibility."[1] This is a necessary perspective for both the baptized child and the faithful parents. This is the very sobering reality that so troubles the parents' hearts. The fear of the Lord, the submission to the commands of Christ, bowing the knee to the Redeemer are all means by which those who have received the promises of God's faithfulness may have any confidence or comfort.

While the mere act of baptism does not ensure confidence in the covenant promises, it does secure the reality of those promises. The truth we hold before our child is of the never diminishing spring of God's promise to save to the uttermost anyone who will return to that mercy, no matter how far away he may have wandered.

So it is that baptism is first God's continuing visible pledge to his church that he will fulfil the promises of his covenant to those who place their faith in him. That promise, sealed in water baptism, is that God does reach down from heaven to embrace the parent and the child with the confident assurance of his grace, based upon his mercy, not the merit of either parent or child. In our moments of great pride in our children, or in those flashes of great shame for our own or the child's failure, God's pledge of merciful grace, so evident in baptism, is always ours by faith. We may claim it for ourselves, but our children must make the same claim.

Baptism has placed each of our children in a most privileged position. They have heard the truths of the gospel. The child has seen, though imperfectly, the example of parental devotion to the Lord. He has lived in a nurturing home and church environment. Each covenant child has been prayed for, that he might know the realities of God saving grace.

So, I return to the beginning. There comes a time when every parent, like my friend, must or should say, "Robbie, I am done. I am placing you in the hands of my merciful Father." This is a loving and true warning to the disobedient or rebellious adult child.

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[1] John Murray, *Christian Baptism* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1962), 90.

Is that the end of it? Certainly not. Let me suggest six principles by which parents, using myself as an example, might now continue to rely on the work of God in the lives of their children. Remember how God continues work in the life of my adult child.[2]

1. **God has not given an infallible promise of believing children to faithful parents.** Even though we might read Proverbs 22:6 that way, "Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it," there is a viable alternate translation which reflects the literal wording, "Bring up a child in his own way, and when he is old he will not depart from it." "His own way" is often contrary to the right way, and so the proverb is as much a warning as it would be a promise. In either case, it is not presented as a guarantee.

Furthermore, the very first words of Isaiah's prophesy declare the dismay of the LORD that *children I have reared and brought up have rebelled against me.* Is not our Father in heaven the perfect Father, yet he had a rebellious and adulterous child in Israel. If it were true that good parenting always brings perfect results, would it not be odd that Almighty God would say such a thing.

Jesus also speaks of the certainty of strained family relations in his kingdom.

> Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. For from now on in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three. They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law. (Luke 12:51–53)

Based on these references it does not appear that the Bible gives us an absolute assurance that even faithful parenting will always bring us believing children. To be faithful is likely to give us believing children; we should always continue to hope and pray that it will.

2. **I am not responsible for my adult child's sinful choices**. We would never have tried to teach our child how to sin. "Now Robbie, I want you to learn here how to lie, how to cheat at *Chutes and Ladders* (I often found that I had to figure how to cheat to lose at *Chutes and Ladders*), here is how you can use God's name in vain." Now, I certainly would admit to giving plenty of examples of harshness, being critical, having an uncontrolled temper, and he could tell you a multitude of his parent's sins. But that is the exact point. He knows many of his parent's actions were sinful, noting especially any sinful actions that affected him but were certainly an abomination before God. He knows sin as sin. So, when he sins, even if that choice is not recognized as offensive in today's changing moral environment, my child still knows. It is God's prophet who tells the parent, "the father will not bear the punishment for the son's iniquity. . . . his wickedness will be upon himself" (Eze. 18:19–24).

Parents should remember that one of the ways the enemy of their own souls operates is as an accuser. He will constantly remind every parent of a wandering child of multiple general, or even specific failures to assault a sensitive conscience. Does that mean I am

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[2] I believe that the ideas for these principles came from a discussion leader's handout my wife brought home from a Presbytery of New York and New England women's retreat.

absolved of my own parental errors? Not at all. I stand before my Father in heaven convicted of my own sins, from which I need to repent and seek forgiveness from God and my child. However, as a parent I know that my child is solely responsible for the immoral choices he has made.

3. I must not protect him or her from all the consequences of his or her sin, because I might be interfering with the work God is doing in his or her life. Protection is one of the innate responses of most animal and human parents. It is noble and often necessary. I ran myself to exhaustion running up and down the street, holding the seat of my daughter's new bicycle so that she would not crash and be injured. But when that same daughter steals, or lies, cheats on her school exams, or becomes pregnant out of wedlock, I dare not protect her from just or hard consequences. One of the very fundamental characteristics of the naïve in the book of Proverbs is that she is warned, but goes ahead against all wisdom, warning, and exhortation. The *simple* never seem to see the danger approaching, and so they must pay the penalty for their choice (Prov. 27:12). In addition, often it is the observation of justice or consequence that has the greatest benefit to the foolish one (Prov. 19:25; 21:11).

4. **All my failures as a parent cannot negate the work of God in my child's life, or my life**. Notice the premise here: I, as a parent, have failures. Because I recall some of those failures, I can be very sad that God has not ordained that, as a parent, I will be the Lord's servant who "reaps the harvest." First, that does not mean that God does not use my planting, watering, and cultivating work in the heart of my child. God uses the wise and often amazing spectrum of his providence to bring his children home. So, realize that part of praying for your child acknowledges that God would use whatever events necessary to turn his heart to the truth of grace in Christ.

5. **I am just one of many means that God may use and is using in the life of my child.** This is a true principle in all the work of God in his Kingdom. Our prayer is that God will use us as parents to lead our children to the Christian faith. But, perhaps, I am just the sower of the seed. That seed bears fruit in the heart of the child as God the Spirit uses other means to expose his sin and shine light on his spiritual need. And the only solution to his need is the person and work of the Lord Jesus. Hopefully, it could be that even the errors and failures we transparently admit and confess in our parenting could be one of the instruments the Spirit uses.

6. **It is within God's power to save my child; however, I cannot save him or her.** One of the prevailing questions hanging in the air in times of reflection, or even in our prayer, is whether it is too late. Perhaps, we are prone to think, the child has gone too far and has committed such grievous sin that there is no hope.

Christian parents must reaffirm the conviction of the truth we know, that "Salvation is from the Lord" (Jonah 2:9). Think again—which character in the biblical history was worthy of God's redemption? Which of our church fathers merited saving grace? Which of us? Yet God, in his own time and in his own way, reaches to the depths of man's sin and brings light and grace, faith and sanctification, the redemption of lives to undeserving men and women, young and old. This is called grace.

I conclude with a reference to Jesus's parable of the Kingdom which describes the man who cast his seed upon the ground in Mark 4:26ff. When he had finished, he went to bed. He did not get up in the middle of the night, or even the next day, to dig up the small seed and check for a developing tap root or for signs of fruit. He knows the "earth produces crops by itself" – slowly by slowly. But "when the crop is ripe, he knows the time of the harvest has come." Believing parents do not need to constantly be asking, checking, commenting on the spiritual condition of their children. They know where you stand, they know where they stand, and God is dealing with them in his own way and time.

If it comes to it, and you have to say, "Robbie, I'm done," leave it indeed in your Father's hands. Keep loving that child; continue to pray for him, even when you feel that your prayers have become rote or mere repetition. Pray against the footholds of the enemy; speak works of truth when it is appropriate, and do not apologize for the truths of your faith. Remember the covenant promises of God in your child's baptism.

By the way, in the case of Robbie (the name has been changed), it has been a delight to know that the Lord did bring that son to himself, and he is now a godly man, married and rearing his own family to know and love the Lord, his God.

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ServantTruth

The Writings of Meredith G. Kline on the Book of Revelation: Chapter 3 – "The First Resurrection: A Reaffirmation" (1976)

by Danny E. Olinger

Meredith Kline's 1975 "First Resurrection" article triggered a published response in the *Westminster Theological Journal* by his fellow Gordon Seminary faculty colleague J. Ramsey Michaels. In "The First Resurrection: A Response," Michaels first praised Kline's contribution. He declared that Kline's "excellent study" had raised the discussion of the millennium and "the first resurrection" in Revelation 20 to a higher plane, beyond the usual charges and counter charges of "spiritualizing" and "unwarranted liberalism."[1]

Michaels then summarized that which he believed stood at the heart of Kline's article. According to Michaels, Kline's main points were: 1) "first" and "second" in Revelation 20 denote a difference of kind, not mere sequence; 2) a double binary pattern, the complex interweaving of "first" resurrection and "second" death in Rev. 20:5 and following, presupposes in the text a second resurrection and a first death. The announced members of this pattern, first resurrection and second death, are to be understood metaphorically. The silent members of this pattern, second resurrection and first death, are to be understood literally; 3) living and reigning with Christ for a thousand years in Revelation 20 is to be identified with the immediate state.

Michaels's Questions of Exegesis and Logic

From this summary, Michaels presented five questions/observations—which he believed flowed from exegesis, logic, and a "rather conventional" premillennial view—that opposed Kline's argumentation.[2] Michaels first argued that, although Kline was correct in saying that the first death is literal, it did not follow that the second death is metaphorical. According to Michaels, in Revelation 20:11–15, the close connection between the second death and the second resurrection is such that "it is hard to understand how [Kline] can at the same time refer to the former as 'metaphysical' and the latter as 'literal.' Both represent realities beyond the scope of human experience."[3] Believing that he had proven that both deaths are in some sense literal, Michaels asked "why not both resurrections?"[4]

In his second question/observation, Michaels stated that Kline could not be faulted for his basic assertion that a parallelism exists between the use of "first" and "second" in

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[1] J. Ramsey Michaels, "The First Resurrection: A Response," *Westminster Theological Journal* 39, no. 1 (Fall 1976): 100.
[2] Ibid., 101.
[3] Ibid., 101.
[4] Ibid.

Revelation 20, and that of "first" and "new" in Revelation 21. Michaels also acknowledged that in Revelation 20 and 21, 1 Corinthians 15, and Hebrews, the binary patterns of "first" and "second," "first" and "new," and "first" and "last," refer not to sequence but to realities that are qualitatively different. What Michaels objected to was Kline's belief that the contrast in Revelation 20 of "first resurrection" and "second death" is a double binary pattern. He wrote, "It is true that Kline can point to the use of the word 'death' in 20:13f. and 21:4 as evidence that the *concept*, though not the term, 'first death' is present in the context. But is this an adequate basis for reconstructing a 'double binary pattern?'"[5]

In Michaels's opinion, what Kline had done was to supply "phantom" elements not found explicitly in the text. The first resurrection is set in contrast to the second death in Revelation 20, but there is no basis in this text for speaking of two different kinds of resurrection or two different kinds of death.

Michaels, in his third question/observation, maintained that Kline, in much the same manner as G. B. Caird,[6] had applied a form of Kantianism in arguing that what is called "resurrection" in Revelation 20:5 and following is the physical death of the believer. For Michaels, Kline had created a paradox. On the one hand, Kline argued the "first resurrection" is first because it is passing away, and thus, making it antithetical to consummation. On the other hand, Kline stated that it can be called a resurrection because it leads to the eternal state for the dying Christian.

In his fourth question/observation, Michaels continued to press what he believed was Kline's use of paradox. If the "first resurrection" is not the traditional New Testament hope, Michaels asked, "Where then does the common hope of a bodily resurrection for Christians come to expression in chapter 20? The only alternative to Kline's answer is the traditional premillennial one: in the phrase, "the first resurrection."[7]

In his final objection, Michaels noted that Kline referred to Revelation 6:9–11 "only in passing," although in Michaels's judgment it comes the closest to the language of Revelation 20:4–6. Both texts refer to Christian martyrs, but in Revelation 6 the number of martyrs is not complete as it refers to the immediate state. Revelation 20 refers to a subsequent stage for martyrs, which Michaels asserted could only be the bodily resurrection at the coming of Christ.

Michaels concluded, "In spirt of being informed and challenged by Professor Kline's article, I remain unconvinced that the 'first resurrection" is a paradoxical expression for the death of the saints."[8]

The First Resurrection: A Reaffirmation

Kline's "The First Resurrection: A Reaffirmation" appeared immediately after Michaels's "Response" in the same issue of the *Westminster Theological Journal*. In a revealing self-confession, Kline said that he admired the courtesy Michaels demonstrated, but "as one notably deficient in irenic grace I could almost wish he had set a less noble

[5] Ibid.

[6] G. B. Caird, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine* (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1966).

[7] Michaels, "First Resurrection: A Response," 106.

[8] Ibid.

example! Despairing of matching it, I tender my apologies beforehand, ere the ardor of offensive defensiveness has quite carried me away."[9]

In the paragraphs that follow, Kline's language let the reader know why he had extended his apologies beforehand. For Kline, the questions of exegesis regarding Revelation 20 that Michaels raised were not so much a criticism of Kline's article, but "a novel proposal of his own setting himself against the commentators of all millennial schools on what has been a point of fundamental, if formal, agreement among them."[10]

Michaels might have characterized his approach as "conventional premillennial," but Kline believed that Michaels had implicated all commentators who see a double pair of first and second death and first and second resurrection in the interpretation of Revelation 20:4–6 as having erred. Kline steamed, "In spite of the bold manner in which this proposal is introduced as being 'of course' what John says, it must strike most readers of the Book of Revelation as a strained exegesis, unnatural to the extreme."[11]

How Michaels Came to His Position

Kline believed that it was clear enough to see how Michaels had arrived at his position. Once Michaels acknowledged with Kline that "first" and "second" in Revelation 20 and 21 denote a qualitative difference and not mere sequence, then the traditional double binary pattern interpretation accepted by all sides spells the end of premillennial exegesis.

The decisive issue in pinpointing this in Michaels's "Response" was his assertion that, in Revelation 20:4–6, John only presents one death experience and one resurrection experience. Michaels followed this with the unfounded assumption, in Kline's judgment, that if first death and second resurrection are not present explicitly in the text then they are not present either in the thought of the text.

The reality, however, is that when the concept or experience of first death appears in Revelation 20:4–6 and 20:13, 14, it is brought in immediate juxtaposition to the term "second death."[12] The concept of a second resurrection appears in the context of Revelation 20:12 and following where the term "first resurrection" is used. This flatly contradicts the contention of Michaels.

Furthermore, Michaels's belief that John never pairs "first" with "death" is contradicted by Revelation 21:4. Kline noted, "Revelation 21:4 says that death and the related phenomena of sorrow, crying, and pain will be no more in the new world and explains this absence of death by the statement: 'for the first things are passed away.' The death in view here is identified as one of the 'first things' (i.e., as belonging to the pre-consummation order)."[13] Accordingly, Michaels's argument in his second question is unfounded, contradicted by the textual evidence, and quite pointless.

But Kline also believed that Michaels's positive exegetical proposal was also flawed. Although Michaels agreed that a qualitative contrast is denoted by the first-second pair in Revelation 20 and 21, he disregarded the nature of the contrast as being a contrast of two orders, one old and pre-consummate and the other new and consummative. The result is a

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[9] Meredith G. Kline, "The First Resurrection: A Reaffirmation," *Westminster Theological Journal* 39, no. 1 (Fall 1976): 110.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Kline observed that the same was also true in Revelation 2:10, 11.
[13] Ibid., 111–112.

bare notion of difference in understanding the meaning of "first" in first resurrection and "second" in second death. John uses "first" and "second," however, to contrast the old and new varieties of one entity, specifically death *or* resurrection. Michaels wanted to contrast totally different entities, specifically death *and* resurrection.[14]

The trouble with Michaels's explanation was that it led to the conclusion that "first" and "second" expressed similarity and not difference. If, as Michaels claimed, the "first resurrection" is so named because it is the only one to deserve the name, then "first" apparently means the real thing. Likewise, if "second death" is so designated because it has finality, then "second" apparently means final. Kline observed, however, that if "real" and "final" are comparable at all, they are synonymous, not antonymic. He concluded, "It is a question, therefore, whether the exegetical proposal of the Response is intelligible, let alone credible."[15]

Revelation 20:4–6 and Premillennialism

For Kline, it was not only Michaels but also premillennial exegesis that had been backed into an exegetical corner. Rightly understood, Revelation 20:4–6 contains two kinds of death experiences and two kinds of resurrection experiences. That leaves "no options in sight that would salvage the premillennial exegesis."[16]

Kline explained that, if the "second death" simply finalizes physical death, then there would be no resurrection of the wicked—something Michaels knew needed retaining—because man's disembodied condition would be perpetuated. Michaels's solution is to say that the resurrection of the wicked is paradoxically called the "second death," since it is only formally a resurrection. Kline reckoned, "Certainly a death that consists in disembodiment differs in kind from death as re-embodiment to suffer eternal perdition."[17]

Kline believed that Revelation 20:14, with its picture of the death of the grave and intermediate state as being terminated in the lake of fire, proved this point. The lake of fire brings about a new kind of death, a re-embodiment to suffer eternal punishment, a second death.

If the term "metaphysical" brings about the belief that the second death is not an actual event, that is, a spiritual death that is not the experience of the total person raised from the grave, then that is a serious disadvantage. "But whatever adjectival term we use to distinguish them, we are dealing here with two very distinct kinds of death."[18]

According to Kline, what was true regarding the two kinds of death in Revelation 20 and 21 was also true of the two kinds of resurrection there. Further, the two support and really demand each other as the resurrection of the wicked is paradoxically designated the "second death" and the death of believers is paradoxically called the "first resurrection." In order to preserve a premillennial exegesis, Michaels accepts the first pairing but rejects the second pairing as a contradiction of terms if "first" is understood as pre-consummative.

Kant and Van Til

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[14] Italicized emphasis of "or" and "and" is Kline's.
[15] Ibid., 113.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid., 114.

Kline then turned from the exegetical to the philosophical in his unraveling of Michaels's Response. In Kline's opinion, the only matter in which Michaels had succeeded was in showing "how seriously he has been influenced by the Kantian dialectic, to which as a matter of fact he refers with approval."[19] In Michaels's Kantian hands, the resurrection cannot be spoken of as belonging to the present order in an intrusive sense and at the same time as being consummative. That is, the resurrection is an ideal abstraction of the noumenal realm that cannot enter the phenomenal realm and participate in history. Thus, for Michaels time with its chronological distinctions of earlier and later has no significance for the resurrection. Kline said, "Set in that framework, the already and the not yet ceases to be the biblical structure when it is reinterpreted within the Kantian system; they cannot come together as coordinate dimensions of individual historical experiences."[20] The result of "this profoundly unbiblical approach" is that it denies that "there is a difference in kind between the 'resurrection' which the Christian experiences when he passes into the immediate state at death, absent from the body though at home with the Lord, and the resurrection he experiences at the day of the redemption of his body and glorification."[21]

After making clear his opposition to Michaels's Kantian dialectic in regard to the resurrection, Kline indicated that he had taken offense in Michaels's assertion that Kline had approached Revelation 20 in the same philosophical manner. Kline said,

> Regrettably, a personal note must be intruded here. For in this connection the Response links my hermeneutics with the Kantian world view, and I may not let my Christian witness be thus compromised. To dispel any false impression that might exist, let me say that there is no later Kline, only an older version of the Van Tilian, Reformed, Covenantal, garden variety of Christian he was in the 1948–1965 Westminster period. I still reprobate the Kantian dialectic that comes to expression in Barthian hermeneutics, exemplified in a commentary like that of Caird on Revelation, and I can only deplore its insidious influence within evangelical circles.[22]

Revelation 20 and 21

Kline stated that although he had covered the decisive issues that would be determinative of one's judgment of the exegetical issues raised, the remainder of Michaels's Response called for comment. He next objected to Michaels's separation of Revelation 20 from Revelation 21, which, according to Kline, led to a false identification of Revelation 20 as the climactic vision of Christian hope and an arbitrary insistence that the bodily resurrection of believers be found within these literary confines lest a gnostic reading contaminate the text. The larger question for Kline here involved the structure of Revelation and how Revelation 20 fits within that structure, a matter of great importance. Revelation 20 was one part of an extensive division where all the major figures in the book are brought back and dealt with in finality. Satan's turn comes in Revelation 20, which explains why it should be no surprise that the chapter does not feature the final resurrection of believers. The more appropriate section for the final resurrection of

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[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid., 114–115.
[22] Ibid., 115.

believers is Revelation 21:1–8, the last part of the “final judgments” division. Likewise, the more appropriate section for the climactic vision of Christian hope is Rev. 21:9–22:5 where there is the revelation of the bride of the Lamb dwelling in the eternal city.

In response to Michaels’s fifth point, Kline pointed out Michaels’s faulty reasoning when comparing Rev. 6:9–11 and Rev. 20:4–6. Citing a difference in the number of believers in the two texts, Michaels argued on the principle of continuity that 20:4–6 “must refer” to a subsequent stage that could only be the bodily resurrection beyond the intermediate state.

Kline agreed with Michaels that there was a progression in the movement from Revelation 6 to Revelation 20 from incompleteness to completeness, but Michaels erred in not seeing that both passages refer to the intermediate state. Revelation 6:9–11 views the church at an earlier distinct point in the intermediate state than Revelation 20:4–6, which views the entire period of the church in the intermediate state, but both share the same eschatological position. Judgment, attested by the bestowal of the white priestly robes, has already been rendered in favor of the martyrs in Revelation 6:9–11. They share in Christ’s sabbatical session on the heavenly throne like the saints in Revelation 20. The believers in both passages are vindicated, but awaiting God’s punitive vengeance upon the wicked. Kline stated, “This full and striking parallelism between 20:4–6 and the vision of Rev. 6:9–11, which admittedly refers to the intermediate state, is a powerful confirmation that ‘the first resurrection’ of Rev. 20 refers to the experience of death through which the Christian enters that blessed and holy state.”[23]

Premillennialism, Postmillennialism, and Common Grace

Having finished his response to Michaels, Kline offered what he labelled “an appendix” to offer some additional comments on the millennial question. Kline first questioned the wisdom of some Reformed churches in allowing confessional latitude on the subject of the millennium.[24] In allowing the latitude, he believed that the churches were suggesting that how one interpreted the millennium is an isolable exegetical question, not affected by the general body of Reformed doctrine and not necessarily affecting the latter in any confessionally significant way. But, according to Kline, that stance might well stand some rethinking. Of special interest is the way the doctrine of common grace fares in different millennial reconstructions, for that doctrine is a cornerstone of the Reformed view of history.[25]

Kline raised the question because he believed that premillennialism conflicted with the doctrine of common grace. Covenantally formalized in Genesis 8:15–9:17, there was the promise from God that all on earth, the just and the unjust, would be granted a measure of the blessings of earthly life until the termination of the present world. Until the consummation, the order of common grace is open to penetration by the world to come, but it is not subject to eclipse. Premillennialism, however, features “a theocracy on

[23] Ibid., 116–117.

[24] Kline probably had the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod, in mind. In 1975, the year prior to the publication of the article, Kline’s own OPC and the RPCES had attempted to merge. In the negotiations between the two churches, a statement on eschatological freedom was put forth by the RPCES in 1974 but was rejected by the OPC. When the actual vote took place on the campus of Geneva College during the simultaneous meetings of the two churches in June 1975, the OPC voted to merge but the RPCES declined.

[25] Kline, “First Resurrection: A Reaffirmation,” 117.

earth before the consummation, a universal kingdom of Christ in which those blessings hitherto received in common by all men and often in greater measure by the unjust than the just are no longer apportioned according to the principle of common grace but according to a policy of special favor to the people of God."[26] Short of the consummation, then, the redeemed in premillennialism are already in possession of glorified natures and experience their public vindication over against the wicked, a contradiction of God's covenantal guarantee in Genesis 8 and 9.

Kline admitted that the cogency of his argument might be questioned on the grounds that Israel was in the Old Testament an earthly theocracy established by divine appointment. But, he countered, theocratic Israel under the old covenant was a limited, local kingdom where other nations coexisted with Israel and the common grace order continued uninterrupted. In classic premillennialism, however, the theocracy is a universal world order where there would be suppression of the common grace principle with its judicial order of the state.

Postmillennialism also has its difficulties in reconciling with the covenant of common grace. In premillennialism, "the millennial kingdom is a church-kingdom ruled over by Christ, who, on this view, had returned before the millennium"[27] In postmillennialism, "Christ does not return with the glorified church until after the millennium and meanwhile the millennial kingdom is a state-kingdom."[28] But, like premillennialism, postmillennialism is in conflict with the doctrine of common grace when it locates the messianic kingdom prophecies in an earthly millennial kingdom where the universal ideal of old covenant law is realized. Consequently, consistent postmillennialists interpret the Mosaic covenant that God gave Israel as the constitution for the Old Testament theocratic kingdom as the constitution for an ordinary state kingdom. "What was meant to apply to the special redemptive institution of the theocracy—the demand to confess God, the guarantee that obedience to the covenant stipulations will be rewarded with earthly prosperity and power, etc.—must all be regarded by the postmillennialist as normative for the state, any state."[29]

The result of such a conception is the undue mixing of the biblical concepts of the common and the holy. That is, what common grace makes secular is sacralized, and what the old covenant theocracy makes sacred is secularized. Kline concluded, "It appears then that certain varieties at least of premillennialism and postmillennialism are not compatible with the biblical doctrine of common grace, so important in Reformed theology. The amillennial position, on the other hand, is altogether consistent with it."[30]

Kline admitted in the closing paragraph that the time had not yet come for such a radical proposal in changing ecclesiastical policy regarding confessional liberty as to a millennial position. Nevertheless, he believed that through encounters such as his with Michaels that the church was being drawn indirectly into a more complete integration of eschatology into the Reformed system of theology.

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[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid., 118.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid., 118–119.
[30] Ibid., 119.

ServantTruth

A Study in the Structure of the Revelation of John, Part 1

by Meredith G. Kline[1]

Thesis Statement

> One of the structural principles of the Apocalypse is to set before us different series of pictures relating not so much to successive events as to the same events under different aspects, each series complete in itself and inviting us to think less of its temporal relations to those which precede and follow it, than of the new and different light in which it presents an idea common to itself and them.[2]

This statement represents fairly the synchronous structure of Revelation to be defended in this paper (provided that "the same events" is understood in a very broad sense, as indeed William Milligan does, and not as specific events recorded in history books). The danger is particularly strong in the case of the recapitulationist that the natural desire to find symmetry in the structure will betray him into sacrificing the thought, at least as to proper emphasis, for the sake of establishing a certain formally symmetrical arrangement of the visions. For instance, William Hendriksen, in dealing with the latter chapters, is consistent with his main principle that there are seven parallel sections and "each of them spans the entire dispensation from the first to the second coming of Christ."[3] In finding indications of the beginning of the Christian dispensation here he is correct; however, the overwhelmingly predominant thought of final judgment pervading the entirety of this section is not sufficiently evident in Hendriksen's exposition. This is symptomatic of his general fault in not applying adequately his principle that "there is progress in eschatological emphasis."[4] Whatever may be its dangers of being abused, however, this structural principle of synchronism or parallelism or recapitulation is valid and necessary to a proper interpretation of Revelation. This thesis is here developed by dealing with certain introductory questions, by the exegesis of the climaxes of the main divisions and the consideration of related problems, and by a more direct refutation of the successive-judgment view.

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[1] This text is the ThM thesis of Meredith G. Kline for Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, PA, 1946.
[2] William Milligan, *Lectures on the Apocalypse* (London: Macmillan, 1892), 100.
[3] William Hendriksen, *More than Conquerors* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1944), 25.
[4] Ibid., 47.

Objections to Recapitulation Refuted

To clear the way for the study of the text and to ground the Revelation of John in biblical apocalyptic, we evaluate three objections of a general hermeneutical character elaborated by David Brown[5] from Marcus Dods's *Introduction to the New Testament* against the understanding of Revelation as a presentation largely of ideas rather than events, which historically, and not naturally exegetically, has gone hand in hand with recapitulation.

1. It is "out of keeping with the general purpose of apocalyptic literature," which is to treat of the "the Kingdom of God oppressed by hostile worldly powers; in both books (i.e., Daniel and Revelation) successive periods in the history of this struggle are definitely though symbolically predicted."[6]

The idea of the world's hostility is true enough, as is that of the final triumph of God's kingdom, which he later adds; but that "successive periods in history" need be involved as of the essence of true apocalyptic is erroneous. Undeniably there are four successive historical empires before the founding of God's kingdom in Daniel, but far from Revelation being required to share this trait, it would be in direct contradiction to Daniel if it did so. For in Daniel, the coming of God's kingdom in Christ—the stone smiting the image—does away with world powers. We do not—cannot—interpret this literally, but we do insist that the Old Testament prophet's spiritual outlook on the state of affairs introduced by the establishment of the messianic kingdom be shared by his New Testament successor. Daniel considered all kingdoms as in principle, or as to the decisive issue, destroyed by Christ's coming and unworthy of being specifically designated as world empires once the one and only true world Empire of Messiah had been founded. In accord with this is Daniel 7 where the latter issue of the fourth beast, during whose sway Christ's kingdom is established, is represented by ten horns—ten, the symbolic number of completeness—designating the opposition to Messiah's people that would develop after the decline of Rome, everywhere throughout the earth, and down through all the centuries to the Judgment—but in no wise describing successive, specific, historical periods. The only exception to this is the detailed emphasis on Antiochus Epiphanes's anti-type, the little horn which appears among the ten. To this eschatological outlook Revelation is true, for it deals only with the general principles of the world's opposition to the now established kingdom of God, with the one exception of the final stage of the beast's activity. For a fuller discussion, see below: The Eschatological Perspective of Revelation.

2. It "fails to present a sufficient motive for its composition."[7]

First, it is close to presumption to judge what constitutes a proper motive for God's including any specific form of revelation in his Word. Second, such a consideration is highly subjective, and this is aggravated by Brown's unjustly limiting the "ideas" to God's

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[5] David Brown, *The Structure of the Apocalypse* (New York: Christian Literature Co., 1891), 31ff. The source of Brown's three objections is a quote from Marcus Dods, *Introduction to the New Testament* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1888), 243–44.

[6] Ibid., 31–32.

[7] Ibid., 31.

sovereignty, providence, goodness, and final triumph in the vaguest of senses.[8] Third, many of those holding the view Brown disparages find in Revelation thus understood the fairest gem in Scripture, uniting in a fitting consummation of the divine Word the most precious themes of the Bible, illuminating the prophetic element of the Old Testament, elaborating and unifying the eschatological outlines inherent in the teaching of Jesus, Paul, and the rest of the New Testament, and providing an inspiration by its solemn majesty that is not afforded so impressively anywhere else. Fourth, it is a poor substitute for such to offer, as Brown does, a system of historical events—often of the most obscure, trivial, and irrelevant nature—which but vaguely illustrate major Bible themes and would provide scarcely any practical comfort to the afflicted church.

3. It "fails to present a sufficiently definite guide through its intricacies," wavering as it does between predictive and more general contents.[9]

Quite on the contrary, grounding the symbolism in other scriptural symbolism is the only legitimate guide. If some portions are more specific predictions than others, no problem is presented, for the more specific portions are always at the beginning and the close of the gospel age where the really epoch-making, eschatological inbreaking of God's redemptive acts in the world's history transpires. The long intermediate period is similar enough throughout to describe by the general principles or ideas unfolding therein. Again, Brown's system of historical events is no improvement, to say the least, for the events move in a narrow rut altogether out of keeping with the universalism of the New Testament and are so hopelessly without demonstrable scriptural relation to the symbols of Revelation that there are as many sets of events as there are proponents of this system of interpretation.

Outline of Revelation

If we are to speak of the beginnings and endings of various series or cycles of visions within the Apocalypse, it is necessary to have the outline of the book in mind. The divisions which commend themselves to me are these:

Introduction 1:1–8
The Church Imperfect in the World 1:9–3:22
The Seven Seals 4:1–8:1
The Seven Trumpets 8:2–11:19
The Deeper Conflict 12:1–14:20
The Seven Bowls 15:1–16:21
The Final Judgments 17:1–21:8
The Church Perfect in Glory 21:9–22:5
Conclusion 22:6–21

The only division of which the bounds are at variance with the usual ones adopted by recapitulationists[10] is that of 'The Final Judgments' (17:1–21:8). Some demonstration seems required:

1. Within these bounds all the main characters previously introduced are dealt with in respect to their final destinies: Babylon and the Beasts in 17:1–19:21; Satan in 20:1–10;

[8] Ibid., 28.
[9] Ibid., 31.
[10] Compare Hendriksen, op. cit., 42–43.

unbelievers in 20:11–15; and overcomers in 21:1–8. This unity of theme is much disregarded but appears to me decisive and is confirmed by the following considerations:

2. This section begins with one of the seven angels that had the seven bowls coming to John and saying, "Come hither," promising to show the judgment on the harlot-Babylon with whom are associated the kings of the earth and earth-dwellers who sinned with her. So, the next section, if divided as here suggested, begins (21:9) with the angel of the seven bowls series coming to John with the invitation, "Come hither," promising now to show him the bride, the wife of the Lamb. The objection cannot be pressed that the material in 17:1–21:8 exceeds the statement in 17:1–2 of what is to be shown the Seer. For although nothing is said in 17:1–2 of the Beast, the harlot appears at once (17:3) in relation to the Scarlet-colored Beast, and this is undeniably within the proper bounds of this division. The various characters are so closely related that in the discussion of this theme of final judgments they all of necessity appear in relation to Babylon and become legitimate subjects to develop in this section.

3. "Their (i.e., sinners') part shall be in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone; which is the second death," (21:8), supplies a fitting climax to the theme of judgment, especially since judgment on evil ones predominates in this section. Its appropriateness as the closing verse of this division appears also in that this is the last statement in the Revelation dealing in a positive fashion with the destruction of the wicked. It is true that 21:27a mentions sinners as not entering into the Holy City, but the obvious intention of this is to describe the perfection of the city (compare 21:26 and 21:27b) in a negative way, not the destiny of sinners.

4. If the division is made at 20:1, as by the majority of recapitulationists, the resultant division would be the only major one in Revelation not marked by obvious formal boundaries, if not in the first verse, at least in those immediately following (compare 8:3ff). The amillennialist is wont to do this thinking, perhaps, to strengthen the case for his interpretation of 20:1–10 thereby, whereas the premillennialist is more likely to point to the series of "And I saw" phrases (19:11, 17, 19; 20:1, 4, 11; 21:1) and insist that to make a major division at 20:1 is to fly in the face of the obvious formal indications which become impressive by their very accumulation. The latter is correct—on this point. It does not avail to claim that the introduction of a new character, Satan, in 20:1–10, constitutes a new major theme. Just because a red horse gallops forth at the opening of the second seal, nobody will claim the second seal is a new theme since the preceding and following seals introduce different horses! The seals unify all. So, Satan is introduced to develop the same theme of Final Judgment which both precedes and follows 20:1–10 and unifies all.

As a matter of fact, however, I think this strengthens the amillennial view of 20:1–10 since it makes these verses of one piece with what has preceded. Then just as the discussion of the Beast's final judgment took us back to the beginning of the Christian era (17:8, 10), so the binding of Satan (20:2–3) may readily be understood as going back to the same point before his final judgment is presented (20:10). On this basis, the newness of the main character in 20:1–10 *can* be appealed to, to show how unlikely it would be for these verses to follow chapter nineteen in chronological succession.

Climaxes of the Major Divisions of Revelation

The most conclusive feature in the proof that the major divisions of the Apocalypse are parallel in their temporal scope rather than chronologically successive is that the climax of each formal division is the end of the gospel age. Further confirmation arises from the observation of the same phenomenon at the climax of certain parenthetical visions contained within the boundaries of the major divisions. The seven letters to the churches precede the visions proper—see below on progression in the Apocalypse—and do not close with a picture of the end of this age. Futurists who claim that 4:1 on deals with the final segment of this age only, usually torture the seven letters into the form of a historical succession leading up to the end, but to no avail.

SEALS: The seals reach the end of the age already in their *sixth* member (6:12–17).

(a) The vision is beyond doubt based on Jesus's Olivet Discourse.[11] There these astronomical phenomena and the terror of the unbelieving accompany "the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." The cataclysm of the sixth seal is, therefore, also the end.

(b) "The great day of their wrath is come"—ἦλθεν (*ēlthen*) (6:17). This "great day" in Scripture is the consummation of all things. (Compare 1 Thess. 5:2–3; Mal. 4:1; Joel 2:10–11). Swete takes the language as symbolical of national-social changes and decay toward the end, and therefore at this verse, though recognizing that the language refers to the end itself, he is forced to makeshift, "fear anticipates the actual event—there have been epochs in history when the conscience of mankind has antedated the judgment and believed it imminent."[12] Fatal to this is the obvious fact that 6:17 is no longer in the first person as 6:16's "Fall on us, and hide us." This is the inspired comment of the Seer on what has preceded and cannot possibly be construed as the mistaken notion of the terror or conscience-stricken. The only reason for so construing it is that an anti-recapitulation view demands such. I believe this is the most vulnerable spot in the entire book for the opponents of our view who can elsewhere present a somewhat plausible interpretation by calling all the climaxes anticipations or interludes and by appealing to their telescopic-structure concept. None of these escapes works here. The case for the non-recapitulationist absolutely breaks on 6:17.

(c) The lists of natural catastrophes and varieties of unbelieving men affected by this judgment is in each case seven, the number of divine completeness, especially in dealing with the world; this is emphasized by the πᾶς (*pas*) before the last two members of each list.

(d) The characteristic of wrath is not appropriate to the Lamb during the time when the sincere offer of salvation is being made based on the Lamb that was slain. Such is appropriate only when the day of salvation is past, and those who have rejected him receive their due.

(e) The removal of the "heaven" (6:14) corresponds to the heavens fleeing away in connection with the Great White Throne Judgment (20:11), which is admittedly the end.

Since the sixth seal has introduced the great day of God's wrath, what are we to expect in the *seventh* seal? There is much dispute as to what constitutes the contents of this seal.

[11] Matt. 24:29–30; Mark 13:24–26; Luke 21:25–27; compare 2 Pet. 3:10–12.

[12] Henry Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, 2nd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1907), 95. So also Isbon Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1919), 266.

The answers range from one verse, 8:1, to the whole of the Apocalypse from 8:1 on. This is probably the most crucial single point in the book for an understanding of the structure.

Düsterdieck presents a telescopic structure of the Apocalypse whereby each of the seals, trumpets, and bowls-series evolves out of the preceding one. He argues at length against recapitulation and in favor of temporal succession, largely on the basis of the seventh seal.[13] We are led to expect by the crisis to which things have come at the sixth seal, the climactic effect of which is heightened by the visions of chapter seven, that the opening of the seventh seal will reveal the extreme end and final catastrophe, and that with "a certain fulness of significant contents."[14] This expectation is not at all met if we limit the contents of the seventh seal to "there followed a silence in heaven about the space of half an hour" (8:1). It is fully met if we accept the view that the trumpets and all the rest of Revelation evolve out of this seventh seal and form its contents.

In answer to these remarks of Düsterdieck we advance the following considerations:

1. The sixth seal does *not* lead us to expect a final catastrophe for the simple reason that it is itself the final catastrophe that befalls this fallen world. Beyond the cosmic cataclysm and the unspeakable terror of eternally lost souls in the presence of the wrathful Lamb and the throne of God revealed in the sixth seal, what final catastrophe is there that needs to be considered with any fulness of contents? Only the lake of fire remains, and Revelation nowhere elaborates with fulness upon that state. Furthermore, the blessed estate of the righteous in glory has already been dwelt upon at length in the second parenthetical vision of chapter 7 by the time we reach 8:1. We conclude, therefore, that a brief summary statement only should be expected at the opening of the seventh seal. This is exactly what we have. It takes the form of an impressive period of silence; the fact that the duration of this period is described in approximate terminology—ὡς (*ōs*)—indicates that this was the impression made on the Seer and that the half-hour is not meant as a symbolic number. Surely if we put ourselves in the Seer's place in the midst of these tremendous visions and especially at this point when the air has just been filled with the shrieks of the lost and praises of the saints, we must acknowledge that a period that seemed like a half-hour of purest silence would make and leave an indelible impression.

Granting that silence itself is a legitimate symbol, what better way could be found to present this symbol?—in fact, what other way? A priori, silence seems as legitimate a symbol as its opposite, a thundering noise. If the latter stands for God's judgments going forth, why should not the former symbolize God's judgments completed? This meaning is confirmed when we answer the question, "What is the connotation of silence in the prophetical language of Scripture?" In Isaiah 47:5 and 1 Samuel 2:9 the wicked are assigned to the silence of darkness, consequent upon the vengeance of God. In Zechariah 2:13 silence prevails because God has delivered his people and dwells in their midst.

Düsterdieck's puerile objection[15] against the silence obtaining on earth since it is said to be in heaven, is flatly contradicted by Zechariah 2:13 which relates "before Jehovah" with the silence on earth! This would leave the way open also to find Revelation 8:1 at least partially fulfilled in the silence of the lost in their eternal abode, or for a view like Fairbairn's (see below).

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[13] Friedrich Düsterdieck, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Revelation of John* (Meyer's Commentary on the New Testament), (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1887), 260–63.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid., 262.

Habakkuk 2:20 associates silence with God's being in his holy temple. All of these ideas fit admirably into the final, eternal state which the seventh seal is required to symbolize. In the light of prophetical usage, this silence of Revelation 8:1 is a rich and comprehensive symbol, indeed. Fairbairn interprets: "The struggle of conflict is over, the noise and tumult of war have ceased, and the whole field lies prostrate before the one sovereign and undisputed Lord."[16]

2. Still another possible view which has at least as much to recommend it as Düsterdieck's is that the silence represents a withholding of revelation. Revelation 7:13–17 corresponds very closely to Revelation 21:1–8. Now since the only revelation in the entire book that marks a material advance beyond what is related in the sixth seal and 7:13–17 is the final vision of the holy city immediately after 21:1–8, it may be that immediately after 7:13–17, in 8:1, we have silence because the time had not yet come to present this last crowning vision, even though the preceding material leads to that point.

3. There are grave flaws in Düsterdieck's interpretation both materially and formally:

(a) He is forced to read into silence—with no semblance of biblical warrant—the idea of hushed, still excitement in anticipation of the coming trumpet judgments. But where is the information on the part of the heavenly host concerning coming judgments? To ground the anticipations of the heaven-dwellers, he must drag the vision of the seven angels with the trumpets forcibly into the half-hour period of silence and thus willfully ignore the fact that these angels are clearly separated as a distinct vision by the phrase "And I saw," which is a common manner of dividing visions in Revelation.

Quite similar is the view of A. Pieters. Concerning the sixth seal he says: "In Scene 3 of this Act (see program) men begin to be aware of the gathering storm"[17] (the removal of the heaven as a scroll, Pieters apparently considers a gentle spring zephyr). Then of the seventh seal, "So the hosts of heaven stand silent, in breathless expectancy, waiting for the solemn pageant to proceed. Notice that this silence is, again, a purely dramatic touch, having no prophetic or doctrinal significance in itself, but placed here because the principles of dramatic art require it."[18] Such extreme insistence on the resemblance of the Revelation to a drama cheapens the divine Word as much, if not more, than classifying biblical apocalyptic on a mere par with and as of one cloth with other early apocalypses which Pieters is careful to guard against.[19] It is asking too much of us, to require us to cease comparing Scripture with Scripture to determine Scripture's meaning, in favor of comparing Scriptures with the devices of the Greek stage!

(b) From a formal viewpoint it does not seem warranted to consider the cycle of trumpets as evolving from the cycle of seals. The trumpet cycle is clearly marked off as a formal unit by the phenomena of 8:5 which are repeated at the close of the cycle (11:19). Also, the seven-sealed book does not appear again, though—if the remainder of the visions constituted the contents of the seventh seal—we should expect that when its revelations were exhausted there would be a final reference to it, at least.

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[16] Patrick Fairbairn, *Prophecy, Viewed in Respect to its Distinctive Nature, its Special Function, and Proper Interpretation* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1865), 407.

[17] Albertus Pieters, *The Lamb, the Woman, and the Dragon: An Exposition of the Revelation of St. John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1937), 124.

[18] Ibid., 131.

[19] Ibid., chapter 2, especially 31–32.

Furthermore, the ease with which 8:1 might seem to blend into 8:2 is altogether in keeping with other transitional passages in Revelation, which is simply an evidence of a good literary style. The transition from the trumpets to the next cycle is so smooth that there has been dispute whether 11:19 goes with what precedes or "should be the beginning of the next chapter, introducing a new vision."[20] Compare also the beginning of the bowls cycles (15:1); this major heptad is "another sign in heaven," and thus blends with the earlier signs of the previous cycle (12:1, 3). Again, the last two major divisions have an affinity to the bowls' cycle, for they are introduced by "one of the seven angels that had the seven bowls" (17:1 and 21:9). In so subtle a way the Revelation is even in its formal arrangement made a living, moving organism, rather than a row of detached blocks of material.

4. Even though it be granted that Düsterdieck's view of the formal relation of the seventh seal and the trumpet series were correct, this would not at all militate against recapitulation. For instance, Milligan writes, "We cannot, therefore, separate the trumpets from the seventh seal. The former are not independent of the latter but are evidently developed out of it, although the succession is one of thought rather than time."[21]

Also, Düsterdieck's interpretation of the half-hour silence, if accepted, does not put recapitulation into discard. Lenski understands the silence with Düsterdieck as the hushed expectation of the heavenly hosts but does not conclude that what follows is the contents of the seventh seal. Rather, the climactic nature of the sixth seal decides him on the need of recapitulation if the book is to continue.[22]

But the shining example that all of Düsterdieck's arguments do not avail against recapitulation is Düsterdieck. For in his view the great final catastrophe is not introduced immediately in the trumpet series but much later. Meanwhile the visions immediately evolving from the seventh seal describe "the trial of the patience of saints who are regarded as *awaiting* the day of the Lord."[23] When we observe that Düsterdieck admits that in the sixth seal "the day of the Lord *begins,*"[24] it becomes apparent that Düsterdieck is himself a recapitulationist.

We reaffirm, in concluding this matter, that the cycle of seals brings us to the Judgment at the sixth seal and into the eternal state in the silence of the seventh. As to formal structure, the evidence is wanting for the view that the visions are arranged in telescopic fashion; and even were this not the case, the essential synchronous nature of the revelations of the visions would be unaffected.

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[20] Ibid., 157.

[21] Op. cit., 51.

[22] Richard Lenski, *Interpretation of St. John's Revelation* (Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book Concern, 1935), 266.

[23] Op. cit., 263.

[24] Ibid., 233, line 21.

ServantStandards

Commentary on the Form of Government of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Chapter 21

by Alan D. Strange

Chapter XXI
Licensing Candidates to Preach the Gospel

> 1. The Holy Scriptures require that some trial be previously made of those who are to be ordained to the ministry of the gospel, in order that this sacred office may not be degraded by being committed to weak or unworthy men and that the churches may have an opportunity to form a better judgment respecting the gifts of those by whom they are to be instructed and governed. For this purpose candidates for ordination shall first be licensed by presbyteries to preach the gospel as probationers. After a period of probation sufficient to make trial of their qualifications and service, and having received reports that their services are edifying to the church, the presbyteries may in due time proceed to ordain such probationers, or licentiates, to the sacred office.

Comment: Since God's Word (1Tim. 3:1–7) requires that a man seeking or being considered for church office must not be a novice, the church has rightly inferred that some trial must be made of prospects for the ministry. The church, in other words, must ascertain the fitness of any candidate for the ministry, and there is no reasonable way to do this other than to assign closely monitored duties and proper training/education to those reckoned as potentially gifted and called to office. Those duties, as they are performed, must be properly assessed by session and presbytery: does the man who is licensed, during this probationary period, manifest the necessary gifts and graces to be a minister of the gospel? Men who are weak (not strong in the faith, both in doctrine and in life) and unworthy (not possessing the requisite gifts and graces) should be kept from degrading (bringing it down in the common estimate of the church and the world) the sacred office of the minister.

1 Timothy 3:1–7, and allied passages, sets forth the qualifications for an *episkopos* (ἐπίσκοπος, bishop, overseer, pastor) in terms of graces more than gifts. This has, especially in historic American Presbyterianism, been a source of controversy, being no small part of the Old Side/New Side controversy that led to the first split in the Presbyterian Church (1741–1758). The New Side wanted to make sure that ministers not only enjoyed proper gifting but also possessed the requisite spiritual graces and religious affections. The Old Side wanted to make sure that men were orthodox, properly trained, and confessional. The reunion of the two sides witnessed a Presbyterian church that emphasized both proper graces and religious experience as well as the need for

confessional fidelity and proper theological training.[1] It is too easy for a presbytery simply to focus on a candidate's gifts and training and minimize the necessary graces that should mark all would-be ministers.

Prior to ordination to the ministry, any candidate for it must first be licensed to preach by his presbytery. As a part of the process of licensure, the candidate must undergo testing (trials) to ascertain whether the presbytery will be willing to declare such a man fit for ordination. This period of testing is referred to as "probation," in which the presbytery monitors the ecclesiastical service, especially the preaching, of the candidate to determine whether he ought to be licensed with a view to later ordination. There is no set period for the probation: it must be a sufficient amount of time for the presbytery to judge the "qualifications and service" of candidates, customarily through testimonials of those who are recipients of the candidate's ministrations, both as office-bearers and as ordinary members of local churches. The prospective licentiate's services among the churches must be deemed edifying and contributing to the building up of the church before he is licensed and ordained. Such licensure, and later ordination, is never a "right" merely because a man has received training or deeply desires to be a minister: it is always a privilege to be called to the ministry, and the ultimate discretion in such cases lies with the presbytery, not with the candidate, and not with any particular local session.

> 2. Prior to licensure candidates shall be taken under care of a presbytery. A candidate must be a communicant member of a local congregation of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church; ordinarily it should be of the same presbytery in which he is applying to be taken under care. The presbytery shall receive a written recommendation from the session of the local congregation of which the candidate is a member, certifying that in its judgment his Christian faith and potential gifts qualify him to be taken under the care of the presbytery with a view to ordination to the gospel ministry. It is of particular importance, at this time, that the presbytery inquire as to the grace of God in him and whether he be of such holiness of life as is requisite in a minister of the gospel. It is therefore the duty of a presbytery, in taking a candidate under its care, to examine him respecting his Christian faith, life, service, and the motives influencing him to desire the sacred office. The presbytery must show its continuing concern for the progress of all the candidates under its care, and shall continually guide, counsel, and help them as they further prepare themselves for the work of the ministry.
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> If a candidate desires to place himself under the care of a presbytery other than his own, he shall request his presbytery to forward the written recommendation of his session to the presbytery under whose care he desires to place himself. That presbytery shall examine the candidate as required above of all candidates and, if it receives him as a candidate shall give him all that continuing care above required.

Comment: Candidates for the gospel ministry in the OPC must first be communicant members of local OPC congregations, usually of the same presbytery by which he wishes to be "taken under care." Common practice is that candidates are members of such congregations minimally from six months to a year, so that the sessions of the local

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[1] Charles Hodge, *The Constitutional History of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America*, Part II (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1851), 209–81. See also for a multi-perspectival discussion of this Old Side/New Side split, and later developments, the Symposium on "Revisiting the Division of 1937: The Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Its American Ecclesiastical Context," *Mid-America Journal of Theology*, 18 (2007): 137–97.

congregations can make proper assessment of the gifts of would-be ministerial candidates. The session of the congregation in which a prospective candidate is a member, upon assessment of the candidate's Christian life and character and of observed gifts (even in early stages), communicates in a letter to presbytery its evaluation. Such candidates are usually at least in the latter part of college or beginning seminary and have a clear desire to serve the church as a minister.

If the desire for ministry manifests itself early in a young man's life, a session may seek to ascertain whether he has due gifts for such by giving him opportunity for service in his high school years or later: perhaps assisting in Sunday School or VBS, working as "helping hands" with the deacons (mowing lawns, shoveling walks, raking leaves, etc.), perhaps being discipled by the pastor, an elder, deacon, or other member. The Committee on Christian Education (OPC) has developed the Timothy Conference, an annual conference held near one of the seminaries commonly attended by OPC candidates, hosted by a local OPC, in which speakers can help young men (either in late high school or early college) think about whether they might be fit for ministry, discussing matters like gifting, calling, education, service, etc.[2]

Additionally, the CCE offers the Orthodox Presbyterian Shiloh Institute (OPSI) for men in their last year of college or first two years of seminary. The OPSI gives further instruction, as the Timothy Conference furnishes introductory guidance, to those interested in pursuing ministry in the OPC.[3]

Caution is due here for very young candidates (especially before puberty) who say that they want to be a minister: a pastor or elder should pray for, say, an eight-year-old boy who professes this desire, talk with him about the joy of kingdom service, and even perhaps give some encouragement or guidance to the parents. Time will tell whether a young man genuinely has the gifts and calling for ministry. The potential for this may always rightly be encouraged, but not unduly so when a boy is young: we do not wish to set such youth up for a sense of disappointment to others and failure to themselves. Many young boys in church, in going through the possibilities of what they want to be "when the grow up," may say, "pastor," though later years demonstrate otherwise. Therefore it is best to wait for more mature development of such desires and to be sober about such youthful declarations.

A candidate recommended by the session to be taken under the care of the presbytery is to be examined in "faith and life" by that presbytery. This means that the presbytery, while delaying more thorough theological examinations to the process of licensure, should, firstly, inquire into and satisfy itself to the young man's Christian life: usually the presbytery, in doing so, asks a young man to recount his spiritual journey and his trust in the Lord Jesus Christ alone for his salvation. The presbytery inquires about the grace of God in the prospective candidate and the consequent holiness of life that should accompany such grace, particularly his use of the means of grace, publicly and privately, asking about both his attendance upon the means of grace and the personal and familial use that he makes of the Word and prayer.

The presbytery also wants to know what service the candidate has rendered in the church, whether he senses a call to the sacred office of minister of the Word and

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[2] For more information on the Timothy Conference(s), see https://www.opc.org/timothyconference.html.

[3] For more information on the Shiloh Institute, see https://opc.org/cce/Shiloh_Institute.html.

Sacrament, and the motives that move him to such. That last issue is an important one. A wise elder minister asked me when I was coming into the OPC from another denomination and was laboring in an OPC and as a student at Westminster Theological Seminary: "do you seek ministry in the OPC out of convenience or conviction?"[4] The candidate's motives are important. Some have sought the gospel ministry because they looked at it from the outside and saw a certain "Christian glamour" to it; ministers are seen as exemplary Christians, and they receive a degree of respect and acclaim in the Christian church as those who lead the church publicly. These folks have looked at pastors externally and have envied and wanted what they perceived as its glory, missing its heart of service and sacrifice. More simply, other people are good speakers or leaders and figure that, as a Christian, that can best be used in the ministry.

The motive for ministry needs to be a true servant's desire to wash the feet of the saints (John 13:1–20), to serve God's people as a preacher, shepherd, counselor, encourager, etc. As one of my mentors put it in an evaluation of a sermon that needed reproach—"edify, not impress"—he captured the heart of the ministerial call, as did one of my seminary professors who said, "kingdom greatness is a four-letter word spelled L-A-S-T."[5] These are the proper motives for seeking the ministerial office: you want to edify the saints so that they can live the Christian lives now that God has for them.

The presbytery has many responsibilities here as well with respect to a candidate taken under its care. When a presbytery takes a candidate under its care it should not neglect its duties to follow his progress in seminary, to monitor his work in the churches, to seek both to encourage and challenge him as he prepares for gospel ministry. There are many ways to do this, and it will vary as presbyteries exercise their loving creativity in best shepherding and guiding those under their care. It is also noted in the last part of this section of the FG that a candidate under care of a particular presbytery may wish to place himself under the care of a different presbytery; perhaps he is at seminary, doing a year-long internship, or otherwise engaged in a different presbytery and desires such. If he does, the presbytery under whose care he seeks to come shall examine him as they would any candidate coming under care in that presbytery. There is no formal "transference of care" as such but a re-examination of the sort described here simply occurs in the new presbytery.

> 3. It is highly reproachful to religion and dangerous to the church to entrust the preaching of the gospel to weak and ignorant men. The presbytery shall therefore license a candidate only if he has received a bachelor of arts degree, or its academic equivalent, from a college or university of reputable academic standing, and has completed an adequate course of study lasting at least one year and a half in a theological seminary.

Comment: Historic Presbyterianism has always been committed to a trained ministry (as has historic Christianity, at least in theory). Because other Protestant denominations have had either large numbers of lay preachers (like the Methodists) or large numbers of untrained preachers (like the Baptists), the Presbyterians have sometimes been perceived, or perceived themselves, as "falling behind" in gathering and perfecting Presbyterian

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[4] Asked by LeRoy Oliver in the Presbytery of New Jersey (OPC) for this writer's candidacy exam in September 1988.

[5] These latter unforgettable words were spoken to this writer at his ordination in January 1990 by Richard B. Gaffin, who was giving a charge to the minister from Philippians 2:17.

churches. This has sometimes prompted Presbyterians to compromise on what some on the outside, certainly, as well as the inside perceive as "high educational requirements" for ministry in the Presbyterian church. These requirements for education—ordinarily an undergraduate degree, classically a BA from a liberal arts college, and an MDiv from seminary—seem unjustifiable to some. The historic requirement, however, has been in place not for the sake of those degrees as such but for what such are understood to yield, the knowledge that is needed for ministry and the understanding that one ordinarily obtains through a college or university degree followed by a seminary degree.[6]

The presbytery, in the process of guiding a candidate under care for gospel ministry, might recommend a seminary, if the candidate is not already in one, or other preparatory measures, including encouraging study in accordance with the recommended denominational curriculum.[7] The one who has been taken under care as a candidate for gospel ministry by a presbytery, in the ordinary course of things, as a student in seminary, pursues licensure. Such a man may become licensed at the half-way mark through the course of his seminary studies, though, in practice, at least in more recent years, many candidates tend to pursue licensure more at the end point than the half-way point of seminary.

> 4. The candidate for licensure shall be examined by the presbytery, or by a committee appointed for that purpose, in the English Bible, ecclesiastical history, theology, and the original languages of the Scriptures. The presbytery shall also satisfy itself, by receiving testimonials or by other means, of the candidate's piety and exemplary life and his personal zeal for and experience in presenting the gospel to others. If the examination of candidates is referred to a committee, an examination at least in theology shall also be held before the presbytery; and if one-fourth of the presbyters present at the meeting are dissatisfied with the examination in theology, the candidate shall be required to continue the examination at a future meeting of the presbytery.

Comment: Licensure is the process among Presbyterians whereby the presbytery examines a candidate in theological disciplines, including the Bible and its original languages, theology, church history, and further in life (piety, zeal, etc.), all with a view to declaring that such a man has the gifts requisite for being a preacher. When a man is licensed, then and only then, may he be said, when giving a sermon, to be "preaching;" before this his sermonizing is regarded as "exhorting."

Specifically, the presbytery, usually through the agency of a committee (on Candidates and Credentials, or the like), conducts exams off the floor in general Bible content ("English Bible"), in church history (including the history of Presbyterianism and the OPC), in Greek and Hebrew ("the original languages of the Scripture," a few rare bodies may also examine in Aramaic, since a fragment of the Old Testament is in that language), and in the full scope of theology (from prolegomena to eschatology). The presbytery, or its committee, also invites testimonials from those that the candidate submits as references or others as to the personal piety and exemplary life of the candidate as well as those that can testify to his zeal and experience in evangelism and discipleship.

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[6] Alan D. Strange, "Seminary Education: Its Necessity and Importance" at https://www.opc.org/nh.html?article_id=359.
[7] https://www.opc.org/BCO/Curriculum.html.

While the presbytery may give all the aforementioned parts of the examination to its committee to be performed off the floor and reported back by the committee to the presbytery, it must conduct a theological examination of the candidate on the floor of presbytery. This exam customarily covers all the loci of systematic theology. It should be noted in all exams, both on and off the floor, the presbytery must take account of the candidate's seminary study if he pursues licensure before graduation from seminary. The presbytery is not thereby restricted, e.g., in asking a third-year seminarian who has not had eschatology in his course of study questions in that locus. His not having studied something in the classroom, or in other formal ways, should be taken account of, however, in evaluating his examination.

Ordinarily, a prospective licentiate examined in theology on the floor of the presbytery would have a "lead" or primary examiner, ordinarily from the Committee on Candidates and Credentials. When that primary examiner concludes his part of the exam, the floor is opened for examination to any ministers or commissioned/seated ruling elders in the presbyteries (some presbyteries seat all ruling elders present who are not commissioned; local practice prevails in this situation). When there are either no more questions from the floor or the body otherwise arrests the examination, debate ensues: the question is "shall the presbytery approve the theological exam?" If three-quarters plus one of the presbyters present vote in the affirmative, then the presbytery may proceed in the licensure process. If one fourth of the presbyters vote "no," the theological exam is to be continued at the next meeting of the presbytery.

5. In order to make trial of his gifts to explain and vindicate and practically to enforce the doctrines of the gospel, the presbytery shall further require that the candidate prepare (1) a sermon, which the presbytery may ask to be delivered in its presence, (2) an essay on a theological theme, and (3) an exegesis of the Hebrew or Greek text of a passage of Scripture.

Comment: In addition to all the above cited trials, additional trials of gifts are made by the presbytery with the express purpose of ascertaining further his ability to explain, defend, and implement the doctrines of the gospel. To that end the candidate must prepare a sermon, and in most presbyteries deliver it in their presence. The presbytery also requires a paper on a theological theme, either assigned by the presbytery or written for a theological course in seminary, as well as an exegesis of either a Greek or Hebrew text of a passage of Scripture. This latter exercise may be the text upon which the candidate will preach before the presbytery. By these instruments, together with the examinations and further inquiry into the candidate's life, presbytery may responsibly assess whether this man may be deemed a preacher of the gospel, one qualified, upon completion of all educational and other requirements, to receive a call to gospel ministry.

6. That the most effectual measures may be taken to guard against the admission of unqualified men into the sacred office, no exception shall be made of any of the educational or other requirements for licensure outlined above unless the presbytery, after reporting the whole matter to the general assembly and weighing such advice as it may offer, shall judge, by a three-fourths vote of the members present, that the exception is warranted by the manifest qualifications of the candidate for the holy office of the gospel ministry.

Comment: There is a long history in Presbyterianism of seeking some exception to the educational requirements, in particular from the New Side proponents who wanted such education closer at hand to a Gordon Clark who claimed that his other qualifications met and exceeded these requirements.[8] There have always been those, in frontier conditions, or even today for other reasons (some having to do with the cost of such educational requirements), who have contended that time and circumstances demand no further delay, that ministry beckons and must be attended to now, though all requirements are not met.

Any such exceptions to the requirements mandate that a presbytery contemplating granting such must seek the advice of the general assembly. The presbytery shall lay the whole case before the assembly, presenting the reasons that this candidate ought to be granted an exception. The general assembly considers the particular case and gives its advice to the presbytery, which might range from "the candidate needs to meet all requirements" to "we are convinced by his 'manifest qualifications' that you may proceed with this candidate though he lacks the necessary requirements."

Upon the reception of the assembly's advice, the presbytery should carefully weigh it, all such advice is quite a serious matter (FG 15.8), and act accordingly. If the presbytery believes that it should proceed with the candidate, even if the assembly's advice is to do otherwise, it takes a seventy-five percent supermajority to determine that such an exception is warranted in the case of this candidate. The presbytery may then proceed to licensure.

7. If the presbytery is satisfied with the trials of a candidate for licensure, it shall then proceed to license him in the following manner. The moderator shall propose to him the following questions:

(1) Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice?

(2) Do you sincerely receive and adopt the Confession of Faith and Catechisms of this Church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures?

(3) Do you promise to seek the purity, the peace, and the unity of the church?

(4) Do you promise to submit yourself, in the Lord, to the government of this presbytery, or any other presbytery under the jurisdiction of which you may come?

Comment: When a candidate for licensure has satisfied the presbytery with all that he is required to do to be licensed, the presbytery then proceeds to license him by observing the requirements of this and the following section (7 and 8). First, he must answer in the affirmative four questions. Question 1 pertains to the candidate's most fundamental belief: that the Bible is the Word of God and is the only rule of faith and practice that is not capable of error, which is the meaning of "infallible." This is the

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[8] For the former, see the sources in footnote 1 (above), and the discussion of this in my thesis on Samuel Davies, in which I show that the New Side were not as unlettered as some have assumed (having rigorous educational requirements): https://scholarworks.wm.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=4920&context=etd, see pp. 45–47, especially. For the latter (on Clark), see D. G. Hart and John Muether, *Fighting the Good Fight: A Brief History of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (Philadelphia: The Committee on Christian Education and the Committee for the Historian of the OPC, 1995), 106–15.

primary standard, and note the verb here is that you "believe" this, without any qualifications whatsoever. One may take no "exceptions" or express "scruples," obviously, with respect to the inspired, authoritative, infallible Word of God.

Question 2 involves the candidate affirming that he sincerely (from the heart) receives and adopts the doctrinal standards of the OPC: The Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, as adopted by the OPC. He also affirms that the Bible contains a system of doctrine (its many parts form a unified whole), which system is given expression in the doctrinal standards. Notice here the verbs differ from Question 1: the candidate affirms that he does "receive and adopt" these standards, which he regards as a true summary of the Bible which he has already affirmed that he "believes." Question 3 allows the candidate to affirm his quest for the purity, peace, and unity of the church. The historic Christian church, the Presbyterian Church, and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church thrives or languishes based on its commitment to the purity, peace, and unity of the church. Purity of doctrine and life is first and most foundational and produces peace and unity. Liberalism seeks to purchase the peace and unity of the church at the expense of its purity.[9] A misguided conservativism treats the peace and unity as dispensable. All three are essential and always properly go together: we may never properly pursue one of these at the cost of the others.

Question 4 has in view a promise from the candidate to submit himself properly to the government of the presbytery licensing him, or any subsequent presbytery under whose jurisdiction he might come. It should be noted that this vow of submission is taken, as are all the vows in the OPC *Book of Church Order*, not as an oath of absolute obedience but as a promise to submit to oversight and governance that is "in the Lord." One does not agree, in other words, to submit to a tyranny but rather to submit to government that is manifestly biblical and in keeping with the constitution of the church. Mechanisms exist (recording of negative votes, protests, complaints and the like) for occasions upon which those subject to such government might wish to call into question the constitutionality of a decision. Submission to due church government is always submission in the Lord and never tyrannical unquestioning submission to the rule of mere men.

> 8. After the candidate has answered these questions in the affirmative the moderator shall offer prayer suitable to the occasion and shall address the candidate in the following or similar words: "In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by the authority that he has given to the church for its edification, we license you to preach the gospel, wherever God in his providence may call you; and for this purpose, may the blessing of God rest upon you, and the spirit of Christ fill your heart. Amen."
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> The presbytery shall record the licensure in its minutes and provide the licentiate with a certificate in the following form:
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> At _________________ on the ______ day of __________ the Presbytery of __________________ having received testimonials in favor of ___________________, of his being in the communion of the church, of his piety and exemplary life, of his proficiency in the liberal arts, divinity, and other studies, and of his personal zeal for the gospel and his ability to present it to others, approved all these parts of trial; and he having adopted the Confession of Faith of this Church, and satisfactorily answered the

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[9] While confessionalists lament such compromise, liberals, like Lefferts A. Loetscher, celebrate it: *The Broadening Church: A Study of Theological Issues in the Presbyterian Church since 1869* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1957), especially 90–156.

questions to be put to candidates to be licensed, the presbytery did license to preach the gospel of Christ as a probationer for the holy ministry within the bounds of this presbytery, or wherever else he shall be orderly called.

Comment: This section details what the moderator does upon the candidate's affirmative answer to the four questions of the previous section and what the clerk of the presbytery both records in the minutes and provides to the newly licensed candidate as a certificate of his licensure. The moderator offers prayer, or appoints another whom he finds fitting to do so, and then makes the declaration of licensure. All seems rather patent in this section, just this final comment: the licentiate is referred to as a "probationer," as noted above, which indicates that he is someone "under trial" during his licensure. Like all proper probations, it is not open ended and is meant to eventuate in a call to gospel ministry in some capacity, most commonly, a pastorate of some sort.

9. When any candidate for licensure shall have occasion, while his trials are going on, to remove from the bounds of his own presbytery into those of another, the latter presbytery, on his producing proper testimonial from the former, may take up his trials at the point at which they were interrupted, and conduct them to a conclusion.

Comment: It happens, for a variety of reasons, that a candidate for licensure, while amid trials for licensure, particularly his examinations in the subjects in which he is tested, finds it necessary to move from the presbytery in which these trials are ongoing to another. Perhaps he has been appointed to a year-long internship after graduating from seminary: he has completed some examinations in presbytery x and wishes now to finish them and be licensed in presbytery y, in which the church at which he will intern is located. His "new" presbytery, on due attestation from the presbytery in which he has been being examined, may take up his trials at the point at which they were interrupted and conduct those trials to a conclusion. If the candidate, for instance, started his language exams in one presbytery, passing Greek but not yet taking Hebrew, the new presbytery may accept the Greek exam from the previous presbytery and proceed to administer the Hebrew exam. This section simply makes clear that the candidate need not "start over" in the process of licensure when he moves from the bounds of one presbytery to another but can pick up in the new presbytery where he left off in the old.

10. A licentiate shall move outside the limits of his regional church for an extended period of time only by permission of his presbytery; in such a case an extract of the record of his licensure and a statement of his service as a licentiate, signed by the clerk, shall be his testimonials to the presbytery under whose jurisdiction he shall come. When a licentiate shall undertake regular duties within the bounds of a regional church he shall place himself under the jurisdiction of its presbytery.

Comment: When a presbytery licenses a candidate to preach the gospel, the presumption is that, while the candidate will likely preach from time to time out of his presbytery, particularly when pursuing a ministerial call, and may even live outside his regional church for a shorter period of time, his residence will remain within said presbytery as a sort of base of operations. He will ordinarily report, usually through the Committee on Candidates and Credentials, his activities as a licentiate to the presbytery. This section notes that if the licentiate wishes to move out of his regional church for an

extended period of time, perhaps to serve as regular supply at a church without a pastor in another presbytery, he should notify his presbytery of such and obtain its permission.

If he does obtain permission to move outside the boundaries of his regional church by the presbytery that governs it, the licentiate should present his credentials to the presbytery under whose jurisdiction he comes, namely, an extract of the record of his licensure, i.e., the fact that said presbytery licensed him, together with a statement of his service as a licentiate, detailing such for the new presbytery and signed by the clerk. This shall all serve as "testimonials" to the new presbytery, and he would ordinarily be enrolled, with or without further examination, which would reside in the discretion of the new presbytery, as a licentiate there. The bottom line here is that when a licentiate takes up labors in a regional church other than his own, he should regularize his service by placing himself under the jurisdiction of the new presbytery.

> 11. When, over a considerable period of time, either a licentiate's services do not appear to be edifying to the church, or he is not actively seeking a call to ministerial service except for reasons of furthering his preparation for the ministry, the presbytery may, if it think proper, recall his license. The period of time ordinarily should not exceed two years.

Comment: A license to preach, which includes eligibility to receive a call, is not open-ended. This is because the period of licensure, as noted above, is referred to as a "probation," a time in which a trial is made of the putative gifts and calling of the licentiate. Periods of testing are never open-ended (as in the covenant of works or licensure) as that would not be equitable or practicable. If during the time of probation the licentiate's services—in an internship, pulpit supply, and/or in other avenues of ecclesiastical service—do not appear to be edifying to the church, meaning that those to whom he ministers do not profitably receive such ministrations, the presbytery may recall his licensure.

The period for such probation while licensed is, and should ordinarily not exceed, two years, though the presbytery may determine for good and sufficient reasons to extend that time if they think it expedient. If the licentiate is engaged in further ministerial preparation, perhaps pursuing advanced degrees, the presbytery may take this into account and extend the time beyond the ordinary two years. All of this remains in the discretion of the presbytery, though at some point the presbytery must determine, if no call continues to come to the licentiate, that the probation has gone on long enough unsuccessfully and it is time to recall the candidate's licensure.

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ServantReading

How to Fight Racism *by Jemar Tisby*

By Darryl G. Hart

How to Fight Racism: Courageous Christianity and the Journey toward Racial Justice, by Jemar Tisby. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2021, 227 pages, $24.95.

For many years, people in Reformed and evangelicalism knew Jemar Tisby for his work with the Reformed African-American Network (RAAN), a parachurch endeavor designed to bring the theology he learned at Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson, to African-American Christians. Around 2015, partly in response to the publicity and public outcry surrounding police shootings of black men in the United States, Tisby turned from theology to race—for instance, the disparities between whites and blacks in the United States, the place of blacks and whites in American churches, and the persistence of personal and institutional racism. Around this time he also began doctoral studies in American history at the University of Mississippi. Signs of the change in Tisby's thought came first with RAAN becoming The Witness: A Black Christian Collective. The organization's purpose is to encourage black Christians "to be stewards of the Black prophetic tradition." Tisby's 2019 book, *The Color of Compromise*,[1] a history of white Protestant church's complicity in American racism, combined his historical training and advocacy for The Witness. (Since writing this book, he has taken a position at Boston University's Center for Anti-Racist Research, founded by Ibram X. Kendi.) Tisby's latest book, *How to Fight Racism*, is less scholarly and, as the author admits, more practical than his previous one. That aim may be less successful than planned thanks to a manner of presentation that offers a range of practical pointers without identifying which are the most important or how they cohere.

The meandering nature of this book may stem from Tisby's assumption that many readers want to fight racism and so do not need to be convinced to do so. In the introduction the author seems to concede this observation by advising readers not to worry about what sequence of tips or sets of data to follow but simply to "jump in." Rather than summaries of policy initiatives, legal remedies, or even spiritual counsel for combating prejudice, Tisby implores readers to take a "journey" of self-discovery (7). "Don't worry too much about where to begin," he writes. "If you want a complete step-by-step plan . . . you will remain stuck in place" (14). This seemingly non-urgent approach could conceivably lead readers to a measure of complacency in their fight against racism. In fact, the procedure that Tisby follows in this battle is often abstract and when specific relies on common talking points.

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[1] Jemar Tisby, *The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church's Complicity in Racism*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019.

The three parts of the book revolve around the grids of Awareness, Relationships, and Commitment, which comprise a cycle of practical, social, and psychological tasks by which to battle prejudices. As such, *awareness* of the problem is one part, which along with *relationships* with those hurt by racism and *commitment* to dismantle racist structures form the book's contents. It adds up to an "invitation to dream" of a world in which racism does not "define so much of our reality." Tisby wants readers to "reimagine a life where we acknowledge our differences but do not use them to dismiss or dehumanize others" (11). This rationale explains why in library catalogs *How to Fight Racism* is listed under subject headings for "Christian life" and "personal growth."

Each of the three parts of the book, Awareness, Relationships, Commitment, receive three chapters, and within each chapter an "essential understanding" orients the contents. That formulaic quality again undercuts a sense of injustice and sin that demands repentance, forgiveness, and remedy. The book's "essential understandings" likely reveal more about the author's habits of mind than they provide a roadmap for personal growth and social justice. To develop an *awareness* of racism, readers need first to understand that race is a social construct, then consider the degree to which race informs self-awareness, and finally learn from the past, from slavery and its justifications to police brutality. In the section on *relationships*, Tisby begins by showing such personal bonds are basic to racial justice, before calling for humility and listening to others, and then exploring diversity, equity, and inclusion (all of which point to a fully integrated society). An ideal society is like a party to which everyone is invited (diversity), all guests have a chance to set the play list (equity), and all revelers get to dance (inclusion). To build *commitment*, Tisby first appeals to love of God and love of neighbor (part of Christian duty), then argues that racism is not simply about intentions but is part of institutions, and finally asks readers to recognize contempt as foundational to racism. These essential understandings are part of the book's advice but remain an intellectual jumble without an obvious logic. Again, Tisby's intent may be simply to invite readers to a journey. But that is a fairly disappointing strategy for correcting the wrongs and abuses of racism.

Such an evaluation should not be read as a dismissal of the book, though Tisby hardly writes much that is novel or provocative. The point here instead is that the book already assumes readers oppose racism and want directions for their awareness. Instead of saying, "well, before you enter the field of protest or policy, look in your own heart and relationships," (6) which could be a worthwhile caution against presumption, Tisby mixes a set of platitudes about racism that render it more a social nuisance than a grotesque feature of American society (and its churches). The only mention of specific policies, though very brief, are voting rights, immigration reform, and reparations. But these difficult proposals seem to come more from the headlines than from an informed assessment of the best steps to take, and in which order, to combat racism. The failure to think these policies through becomes apparent in Tisby's inclusion of immigration, since finding more immigrants to enter the United States is not obviously advantageous to American workers at the bottom of the pay scale, many of whom are black.

The failure to go into depth also applies to Tisby's appeal to "Courageous Christianity" in the book's subtitle. Scripture and theology do not drive this book. Notions like men and women being created in the image of God, or appeals to the moral law, or seeing opposition to racism as part of sanctification appear in the book. But they are not its backbone. At times the book does not even appear to be written for Christians.

In his conclusion he writes that “we believe that a poor carpenter from Nazareth conquered death and is forming a people who will join in this triumph” of fighting racism (206). Yet, in the beginning, Tisby says that even though his approach is from a “Christian perspective,” the book is “intended for anyone who wants to work toward racial justice” (10). The specifics of this Christian outlook involve the church’s reckoning with its complicity in racism along with the foundation the gospel provides for rebellion “against racism and white supremacy” (10).

Tisby ends on a note of hope, but it is an optimism grounded in his recent work rather than a broader perspective on American history. His previous book, *The Color of Compromise*, was a catalogue of racism in white Protestant history. It fit the dominant mood in the Trump era that racism has been a deep and abiding part of American history. With a growing recognition of racism’s pervasiveness, Tisby believes “tomorrow can be different.” “The journey for racial justice continues, but the music we hear . . . is not a funeral dirge” but “festival music leading us to a banquet of blessings” (205). Tisby’s is a different version of hope from the one that the candidate, Barack Obama, offered while running as the candidate of hope in the Democratic presidential primaries. In 2008 the U.S. Senator explained that racism in America has not been static, “as if no progress has been made.” But “we know” and “have seen” that “America can change.”[1] That was six years before Michael Brown’s death in Ferguson, Missouri, elevated racism to prominence in discussions of national identity. Will Tisby’s book transcend the current climate of opinion about race, policing, and systemic injustice? If Obama’s understanding proved to be so fleeting, it is hard to imagine that Tisby’s outlook will endure the next cycle of news.

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[1] “Transcript: Barack Obama's Speech on Race,” March 18, 2008. https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=88478467. Accessed May 11, 2021.

ServantReading

The Race Card in a Marked Deck

A Review Article

by Gregory E. Reynolds

An Imaginary Racism: Islamophobia and Guilt, by Pascal Bruckner, trans. by Steven Rendall and Lisa Neal. Medford, MA: Polity, 2018, 206 pages, $19.95.

Never has the power of language had such varied and pervasive vehicles available to it as the internet, mobile, and social media. The Orwellian corruption of language in the service of propaganda reminds us that we live in a rhetorically dangerous time. This and many other themes are skillfully woven together in this important book. The subtleties and richness of French political philosopher and ethicist Pascal Bruckner's writing reminds the reader of the exquisite Bordeaux wine his culture produces. Although Bruckner is dealing specifically with Islamophobia, the lineaments of his exploration apply to the broader subject of racism, which I believe is helpful in our present troubled intellectual milieu in dealing with Islam and American black and minority communities.

I have wrestled over the validity of reviewing this book for *Ordained Servant* because Bruckner is a neo-Enlightenment thinker. He reminds me of Neil Postman, who believed that a return to Enlightenment epistemology was the solution to the problem of technopoly,[1] whereas Bruckner believes it to be the way to help assimilate moderate Muslims into European or Western society. He does understand that modern Islam is a vast and diverse religion with large pacifist and moderate wings, as well as many likely tempered, at least in part, by their contact with Western cultures (consider just three different branches: Sunni, Shia, Sufi, just to scratch the surface). But he also sees that Islam has a large and uniquely militant population committed to its founding texts.

I decided that it is good to review such a book as this (I reviewed Bruckner's book on happiness in *Ordained Servant* in 2011)[2], partly because I think it is important that we challenge and inform our critical thinking with the best thinkers outside of our tradition. Furthermore, Bruckner has insights into the nature of Islam and race that are helpful in unraveling the complexity of our present cultural and religious conflicts.

There are two poles in the discussion of race and the integration of Muslims into Western cultures: difference and unity. Pascal Bruckner points to the different approaches taken by British and French imperialism (18–20). The British allowed the different cultures of various colonies to remain essentially the same, i.e., as they were, respecting

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[1] Neil Postman, *Building a Bridge to the Eighteenth Century: How the Past Can Improve Our Future* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000).

[2] Gregory E. Reynolds, "Flying with Wax Wings: The Secular Quest for Happiness," *Ordained Servant* 20 (2011): 143–49; *Ordained Servant Online* (June–July 2011), https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=260. Pascal Bruckner, *Perpetual Euphoria: On the Duty to Be Happy*, translated by Steven Rendall. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010, 2000 French edition).

their integrity, whereas the French wanted their culture to be imposed on their colonies. For Bruckner the Enlightenment liberalism of France and its European allies is the solution to the integration of Islam.

SUMMARY OF THE BOOK

Bruckner begins, in the "Introduction: A Semantic Rejuvenation," by exploring the definition of "Islamophobia." He notes that its "lexical rejuvenation" (3) conflates two different meanings:

> the persecution of believers, which is obviously reprehensible, and the questioning of beliefs, which is practiced in all civilized countries. Criticism of a religion falls within the domain of the spirit of examination but certainly not within that of discrimination. Striking a religious believer is a crime. Debating an article of faith, a point of doctrine, is a right. Confusing the two is an intolerable amalgamation. (4)

As an example, Bruckner imagines that closing debate over the truth of Christianity with the use of *Christianophobia* would have stunted its evolution (4). While it is unlikely that by "evolution" he has the importance of doctrinal development in mind, it is certainly true that polemics in response to opposition have strengthened, not weakened, genuine Christian faith ever since the ancient church. So, Bruckner defines fundamentalism as closed to discussion of its doctrinal and ethical assertions (5).

The book is divided into five parts with nineteen chapters, an introduction, and an epilogue. The titles are very descriptive of the content of each. Part I, "The Fabrication of a Crime of Opinion," is a prime example.

In Chapter 1, "The Disappearance of Race, the Proliferation of Racists," Bruckner makes the perceptive observation about racism and its supposed opponents, that "anti-racism never ceases to racialize every form of ethnic, political, sexual, or religious conflict. It constantly recreates the curse that it claims to be fighting" (10). As a result, anti-racism undermines the prudence purposes of wise governance by using manipulative language.

> Let us recall that the goal of a wise politics is to prevent discord and avoid war. But anti-racism, which has become the civil religion of modern times, has been transformed into a permanent war of all against all, a rhetoric of recrimination. (11)

Bruckner also understands modern technologies have exacerbated this problem:

> The contraction of time and space brought about by new technologies and means of transportation leads to the abolition of the distances that used to protect us from what was far away. But on a planet where human tribes, constantly on the move, collide with one another, the pressure becomes oppressive. (11)

This makes multicultural societies full of conflict. Thus, the unifying fabric—cultural standards and traditions—is being torn apart. "Difference is being reaffirmed at the very

time when we want to establish equality, at the risk of involuntarily continuing the old prejudices connected with skin color and customs" (13).

Bruckner observes that "political correctness" is a euphemism for a new kind of conformism, "the convention of the unconventional, an orthodoxy of heterodoxy that merely doubles one dead-end by adding another" (13). Among its dangers is its "allergy to naming things" (14), an anesthetizing of language which seeks to eradicate (cover up) difficulties, in other words, the givenness of reality. He goes on to conclude that "to ban *a priori* any criticism of a system, of a religion, is to risk amputating freedom of thought" (15). Thus, instead of "hate speech" being defined as that which incites violence, it is redefined as any speech that is critical of a system or a religion.

In Chapter 2 Bruckner explores the "Weapon of Mass Intimidation," in which he asserts that "The celebration of diversity as a supreme norm can in no case provide a common foundation. It is the very idea of human quality that is abandoned." He goes on to point out something more subtle, "that the unreserved praise of cultural particularities can also conceal a neo-colonial paternalism . . ." (20). In other words, diversity may be used as a weapon to gain control over a particular culture. He goes on to demonstrate how Islam has used this tactic: "So woe be to liberal Muslims who dare to criticize their religion or question their countries' mores" (23). "The accusation of being Islamophobic is nothing other than a weapon of mass destruction in intellectual debate" (24). Opinion has become the new crime.

In Chapter 3, "The Miracle of Transubstantiation," Bruckner contends that contemporary Marxism, because of its moribund position in the Western world, looks to Islam as the best disenchanted, oppressed minority to be an ally in its cause (30ff).

Part II, "The Left Suffering from Denial," explores the political left's denial of the importance of religion in Islam. Bruckner quotes Bernard Lewis to this effect (38). So, he taps into one of the best experts on Islam. Chapters 4–6 seek to demonstrate the existence of and reasons for what Bruckner calls Islamo-Leftism. As odd as such an alliance between Islam and the left would appear, the destruction of capitalism is their common cause (39). Bruckner's analysis is interesting and often quite perceptive. He observes that "Ultraviolence is a symptom of impotence" (43). Thus, terrorism is witnessed on both sides as it is engaged in by Islamic and Leftist extremists. So, Bruckner seeks to explain this "unnatural marriage." Thus, in true Orwellian fashion, the Left seeks to rationalize the extreme differences between the two ideologies. So, just as the Newspeak of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*[3] characterizes oppression as liberation, the Left explains the veil, "The more hidden women are, the more they are free!" (53).

In the final chapter of this section Bruckner explores a phenomenon familiar to Americans, the innocence of criminals and the guilt of victims. He concludes, "Beneath the surface, the far left and radical Islam agree on one point: they want to destroy this society . . ." (63).

In Part III, "Are Muslims the Equivalent of Jews?" Bruckner contends that because Jews are now not as easily characterized as victims, Arabs have taken their place. Jews have become the oppressors. Bruckner's analyses the rise of what he labels a "new pathology: victimism." So, he asserts that "anti-racism always pursues two contradictory objectives: mixture and diversity, universal non-distinction and the beauty of the multiple" (81). His most troubling conclusion is, "*in our time, true racism expresses itself*

[3] George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1949).

in the words of anti-racism" (83, emphasis in original). This point is explored in more detail in the final chapter (10) of this section, "The Semantic Racket."

In Part IV, "Are We Guilty of Existing?" Chapter 11, "The Criminalization of Reticence," reminds us of the recent popular slogan, "Silence Is Violence." One is bullied into taking sides. Bruckner points out the tragic irony of the origin of such control in the very terrorist extremists who claim to be the victims. They bully their own into submission (103). I leave the remainder of this four-chapter section to the curiosity of the reader.

Part V, "What Is God's Future?" begins with a jarring quote from the French poet Jacques Prévert, "Our God who art in heaven, stay there" (135). Bruckner at once respects the Christian church as part of Western culture, while denying the truth of its faith. He does understand what most leftists deny, the reality of radical Islam and its root in Islam's founding texts. He notes that Islam, unlike Buddhism and Hinduism, "offers propitious soil for it (radicality)" (139). Thus, while seeking tolerance of Islam, he insists that "European Islam must abandon its passivity toward extremists" (143). "What we owe to the Prophet's (Mohammed) religion is not pity for its fate but the truth: the recognition for its past grandeur, its current tragedy, and the urgency of its transformation" (144).

Bruckner likens the tolerance he is advocating to the tolerance that Catholics and Protestants learned after centuries of ruthless religious wars, and he even acknowledges that Christian religious wars were waged "in spite of the Gospels" (162, 173). For Bruckner, Islam must evolve from the militarism of its founding texts to a moderation commensurate with Western liberalism.

As Chapter 17 announces in its title, "Western Values Are Not Negotiable"; especially freedom of speech must not be compromised. Bruckner wants no part of grounding his solution in Christian faith. So, Bruckner applies the principle of the historical French colonial mission at home to Europe: "*Therefore the goal should not be to Islamize Europe, but to Europeanize Islam*" (158). His faith is in secular liberal Western governance with the motto: "Life goes on, stronger than anything. Barbarity kills but does not break" (159). But he hesitates to give up Christianity, at least in as much as it contributes to his solution, understanding that such a void will be filled with something else (161). He seems to long for the old American and European past in the post Peace of Westphalia (1648) era (164). He acknowledges that "The genius of Christianity in its maturity is to have been able to provide a space for skeptics and agnostics, to permit them to breathe, far from the Holy Scriptures, in order to enter into dialogue with them" (166).

> Finally, in Chapter 19, Bruckner simply cannot escape dealing with Christianity: Christianity was redeemed because its teeth were filed down, because it returned to the purity of the Evangelical message, to the pacifism of the first centuries before Theodosius declared it the sole religion of the Empire. It was by moving away from Christ's word that Catholicism became murderous and violent, and it is by returning to the founding text, to literalist piety, that Islam is dangerous. (173)

Bruckner ends with a tepid hope, which is understandable given his rejection of historic Christianity or any ultimately transcendent reality. Bruckner is essentially dealing with socio-political realities rather than the transcendent truth of Scripture. He believes

that we must “persuade ourselves and the rest of the world of the eminent virtues of our civilization and our mores” (178).

ANALYSIS OF THE BOOK

It is a sad pleasure to interact with such a fine mind; it is also the duty of Christian leaders to do so. It is part of what Paul calls us to in God’s Word: “For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds” (2 Cor. 10:4).

The Corruption of Language

The theme of linguistic manipulation is one the greatest strengths of this book. Whoever controls language wins arguments and even control over whole populations. Bruckner explores this in detail in Chapter 10, “The Semantic Racket.” But beginning with the “Introduction: A Semantic Rejuvenation,” Bruckner explores this theme throughout the book.

A prime example of this is the conflation of the meaning of “hate speech,” (4) so that persecution, which is reprehensible, and criticism or disagreement, which is a vital part of a healthy civilization, now become the same. Labeling the analysis and criticism of any belief system as hate speech leads to silencing of opposition.

Another example, noted above, is seen when the Left seeks to rationalize the extreme differences between Islam and their ideology by redefining terms or reconstructing the common understandings of various situations.

As I quoted above, Bruckner’s most troubling conclusion about the manipulative use of language is, “*in our time, true racism expresses itself in the words of anti-racism*” (83, emphasis in original). Also, “Racism” is now being defined so broadly that it functions as an all-purpose weapon to gain power by cancelling the rational discussion of issues.

This made me think of the analogy of the marked card deck, which is, of course, the manipulated language of the left along with microaggressions (2 through king) and the race card (the ace). This language is used in whatever circumstance manipulation or cancellation is required to silence an opposing idea. Christians must therefore seek to clarify and define terms carefully and not allow the discussion of truth to be derailed by subtle linguistic alterations. What began with the serpent’s manipulation of God’s Word in the Garden has been practiced by every tyrant in history since.

Noticing and analyzing this dangerous Orwellian phenomenon is an important duty of Christian leadership. Christians should be alert to the pervasive redefinition of words in the modern context. This is a communication problem that Christians must be aware of as we seek to distinguish the gospel from all political agendas.

A Christian Response to Islam

The irony of Bruckner’s analysis and desired solution is found in his conception of the necessary transformation of Islam into a tolerant participant in Western civilization. This would be to deny their founding texts, whereas he lauds Christianity for returning to the founding text of the Gospels (162, 173). Thankfully, the liberalization of many

Muslims through the existence of pacifist traditions within Islam as well as the attractions of Western culture, especially its freedom and prosperity, make assimilation possible and in many cases a reality.

But in this case, rather than ignoring foundational elements of their founding texts, as Bruckner wants Muslims to do, Christians came to acknowledge that the New Testament clearly teaches that Christian warfare is entirely spiritual, and thus they fought with spiritual weapons alone, the chief of which is the power of God's love in the good news of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 10:1–5). So, Christian tolerance came from returning to the text of Scripture.

Bruckner seems to ignore how much of the tolerance he promotes is rooted in the presence of Christianity in French and other cultures. While the degree to which this is true may be debatable in a given culture, the reality of such an attitude is clearly an essential part of Christian ethics. Bruckner contradicts himself here, since the literalist piety of Islam leads them to theocratic militance, but Christians returning to the gospel message of their text seem to be in a different category. In fact, both religions have texts that the true believer takes seriously; but it is the nature of those texts where the difference lies. So, how can it be that "Plurality is the future of the great religions"?

It is no surprise that, despite Bruckner's often penetrating analysis of how to deal with Islam, his solution seems largely untenable. His earnestness, certainly, cannot be doubted since, given the fate of Charlie Hebdo editors and death threats to authors like Salman Rushdie, he is risking his life by writing such a book.

Sadly, he wants nothing to do with the "genius of Christianity in its maturity" which he appreciates as an important ingredient in his program of tolerance. This program is a combination of education and wise governance. Christianity, unlike some other exclusivist world religions, does not need or desire to establish its central authority in an earthly government or caliphate, because its king resides in and rules from heaven. Thus, Christianity seeks to establish embassies among all nations.

Christianity seeks its unity broadly in the *imago Dei* in common culture, and narrowly in the mediatorial person and work of Jesus Christ for his people, while respecting God-given cultural uniqueness, provided that that uniqueness is not contrary to biblical orthodoxy. Differences need a solid common foundation.

For a Christian response to Islam, I recommend two articles that encourage a wise and irenic approach.[4] Bryan Estelle concludes that while we must support government efforts to resist radical Islamic terrorism, the church must not lose its focus on its central mission, preaching the gospel to every kind of neighbor.[5] John Muether emphasizes the importance of understanding the diversity of Islam and the effectiveness of the Reformed Faith in Muslim evangelism.[6]

While Bruckner proves Islamophobia to be "an imaginary racism," true racism does exist in some institutions and certainly in individual attitudes. Christians must avoid conflating terrorists with all Muslims and instead treat Muslim neighbors with respect and love and pray for our enemies (Matt. 5:43–47).

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[4] Bryan D. Estelle, "How Should the Reformed Church Respond to Islam?" *Ordained Servant* 17 (2008): 48–54; John R. Muether, "The Reformed Faith and the Challenge of Islam," *Ordained Servant* 27 (2018): 46–52.

[5] Estelle, "How Should the Reformed Church Respond to Islam?" 53–54.

[6] Muether, "The Reformed Faith and the Challenge of Islam," 47–48, 51–52.

Bruckner's contention that Marxism is seeking rejuvenation by allying itself with Islam, what he calls Islamo-Leftism (30ff.), seems to be similar to what is happening in America, where the oppressed minority is black, Hispanic, or native American. It is no accident that Black Lives Matter was founded by neo-Marxists. Since Marx divided culture into oppressed and oppressors, it makes sense that neo-Marxism must identify these categories differently in different cultures, since class structure is not the same as it was in nineteenth century Europe, especially Russia. Marx makes his position explicit in *The Communist Manifesto*.[7] Neo-Marxism emphasizes the presence of racism, not so much in individual attitudes as in the structural systems and relationships in culture. Thankfully, most minority Americans do not agree with this analysis, which brings us to the problem of racism.

A Christian Response to Racism

Bruckner's analysis of Islamophobia demonstrates the dangers of imaginary racism and the use of deceptive language imposing racism where it does not exist. But it also, unwittingly, demonstrates the weakness of secular alternatives. Bruckner wants to make a way for peaceful Muslims to be part of European society, while recognizing the existence of large radical Islamic populations and the presence of militancy in Islam's founding documents.

While some alleged racism may be imaginary and used in a quest for power, the problem of racism is a real and serious problem. Careful analysis is important, but solutions will not come easily. While institutional and government structures may need to change in some instances, clearly attitudes must change, and while that can happen among unbelievers, the profoundest changes will reside in the new creatures of the New Covenant. While racism will exist as long as human sin does, Christians must oppose it with all of our might and main. Christians have the only ultimately durable ethical foundation to oppose racism in its various forms. Specifically, we must oppose any use of ethnicity, skin color, education, or class to distinguish ourselves as superior to others. More generally, we must oppose anything used to distinguish ourselves as superior to others.

David VanDrunen, in a recent *Ordained Servant Online* article, "Reflections on Race and Racism," distinguishes between two areas of response to racism:

> In political communities, the antidote to racism is recognition of our *common humanity*. Christians believe that all human beings are children of Adam, image-bearers of God, and beneficiaries of God's common grace under the Noahic covenant. However it is understood, our common humanity provides grounds for unity over against the divisiveness of racism and identity politics. But such political unity is relatively shallow, a unity of peaceful co-existence that will always remain fragile in a sinful world in which so many things threaten to divide us. In this context, I believe the (classical) liberalism of the U.S. constitutional order, or something like it, is the best we can do.[8] . . .

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[7] Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1954), 15ff.

[8] For a detailed argument see David VanDrunen, *Politics after Christendom: Political Theology in a Fractured World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020), especially ch.12.

In our churches, however, the antidote to racism is recognition of not only our common humanity but especially our *redeemed humanity*. Christians are co-heirs with the Last Adam, re-created in the image of Christ. Their source of unity flows not from common grace but from saving grace, not from this present creation but from the new creation. These redemptive resources are far more powerful than anything political communities have at their disposal, although churches have often used these resources poorly. [9]

Bruckner's analysis of language and its purposeful corruption in the interests of power is especially helpful in alerting us to deal in a wise and loving way with those who oppose a Christian understanding of the race problem.

David VanDrunen's article, mentioned above, offers an excellent analysis of the word "race." He insists that it does not exist but is a social construct. Unlike sex, which has a biological foundation, race has no objective basis; ethnicity on the other hand does and has nothing to do with a person's skin color,

> We are dealing with "profoundly complex" issues. It is easy to understand that race does not exist, but when an imaginary but powerful concept has taken hold of so many minds for so long and wreaked so much harm, charting a viable way forward is not simple. . . . I urge Reformed churches to resist the call to be politically engaged and to strive to be *consistently* non-political, refusing to "intermeddle with civil affairs which concern the commonwealth" (Westminster Confession of Faith 31.4).[10] Contemporary tensions over race makes this idea *more* important, not less. [11]

Echoing VanDrunen's conclusions on dealing with racism, church officers need to cultivate what he calls the "elusive combination of humility and critical thinking." While the concept of race is imaginary, racism is not, and it must be dealt with using intelligent compassion and not a little self-reflection. There are two poles in the discussion of race which I believe only Christianity can ultimately hold together: difference and unity.

In dealing with racism in whatever form, hatred of or disrespect for Muslims or American blacks, the *imago Dei* is central to the formation of a godly attitude, for to despise others made in God's image is to despise God himself. With so many voices wanting to insist and not discuss, we must exercise a patience, love, and fortitude, which only our Savior can provide.

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[9] David VanDrunen, "Reflections on Race and Racism," *Ordained Servant Online* (March 2021), https://opc.org/os.html?article_id=874.

[10] Some Reformed theologians discuss this issue in terms of the "spirituality of the church," while others believe the term has been poisoned by its abuse and that we should not use it. I will not engage this debate here.

[11] VanDrunen, "Reflections on Race and Racism."

ServantReading

The Great Tradition *by Richard M. Gamble*

The Great Tradition: Classic Readings on What it Means to be an Educated Human Being, by Richard M. Gamble. Wilmington, DE: ISI, 2007, xix + 669 pages, $20.00.

by Mark W. Graham

De Doctrina Christiana is not easy to render into English. "On Christian Doctrine" or "On Christian Teaching" have variously stood in as translations for the title of Augustine of Hippo's most famous work on education. The eminent Augustine scholar James J. O'Donnell convincingly has proposed instead *On the Form of Teaching Suitable for Christians* as the most appropriate translation. Anyone who more than a millennium and a half later would weigh in on the form of teaching suitable for Christians would do well to listen to all the fifty-seven voices Richard Gamble has brought together in this massive collection—men, women, pagans, Jews, Christians, agnostics, ancients, medievals, early moderns, moderns, philosophers, historians, orators, an architect, biographers, theologians, bishops, ascetics, professors, teachers, novelists, essayists, poets, and more.

To be sure, Gamble's own purpose is far broader than answering the question inherent in the title of Augustine's famous work. At the outset he explains that he is following a "continual conversation about what it means to be a truly educated human being" (xvi), tracing out a specific strand of what many have called "The Great Tradition." Now in its fourth printing, the collection has served its purpose well for the time equivalent of one child's journey from kindergarten into early years of college.

For each author, one first encounters a quotation, expertly chosen and helpfully illuminating. These should not be missed—they are far more than mere ornamentation and left me thinking carefully about each author as I encountered each selection. Gamble's brief introduction to each author and to their specific work(s) are remarkably consistent in size, content, insight, and style—not an easy task given the broad range of figures involved here. His own particular approaches to education and controversial questions surrounding it are discernible here, but never heavy-handed or preachy. Throughout, Gamble sends the reader elsewhere to explore authors and questions more deeply, helpfully reiterating that this massive compilation is just an introduction. The reader will get a solid sense as well of the foundational modern scholarship on education and on the specific writers anthologized. A future edition of the work could include as well some leading scholars on education from the latter parts of the twentieth century, particularly for the premodern period. For the medieval period, for example, I would suggest Rosamond McKitterick and C. Stephen Jaeger as indispensable guides for understanding the varied purposes of medieval education over time.

The collection is most helpful when it is understood for what it is and is not. It is not an anthology of readings in Western Civilization, nor a collection, per se, of readings on

the history of western education, nor an illustration of movements or trends within western education, nor even a set of readings illustrating "The Great Tradition." As the subtitle in particular makes quite clear, it is a set of classic readings on what it means to be an educated human being. In this it is remarkably effective, helpful, and illuminating, perhaps even indispensable. The reader should keep the central purpose in mind when reading through the collection.

Each selection is usually allowed to speak for itself to larger and ongoing educational debates, without much commentary – the usefulness of education, the contemplative vs. the active life are common themes. This method works quite well, generally. In a few places, though, inadvertent anachronisms are likely on particularly controversial issues today and in our own circles. Aristotle's emphasis on the state's role in education, for example, is noted as controversial (56). But such a notion would not be particularly controversial in western history until well after the medieval and even early modern periods. Likewise, Gamble's note of the "debate between home schooling and public education" (107) when introducing Quintilian might give some the questionable impression that the terms of such modern discussion bear notable resemblance to what the Roman Quintilian is talking about in his piece.

Some might quibble here and there with what is included or not included. Given the purpose, size, scope, and thoroughness of Gamble's project, I would consider such to be as unavoidable as largely unprofitable and pointless (and, I really cannot point to a single selection whose inclusion I would question). Yet, I cannot resist just two omission quibbles: 1) the opening of Petronius' *Satyricon* and 2) some key selections from Peter Abelard's *History of My Misfortunes.* The former is a ruthless (and well-known) critique of Roman educational ideals and training, an oft-cited counterbalance to idealistic and uncritical praise of the Roman educational system. The latter illustrates a fundamental shift in medieval understanding of what it means to be an educated human being, which played a key role in ushering in Scholasticism. In both of these cases, the specific articulation and textual context is potentially sordid. Yet might not such famous texts, along with the generally more noble and staid ones which make up this collection, speak directly and even wisely to the central important point here?

A certain mischievous professor of religion I know likes to advise students in his department who desire to enter the ministry to change their major instead to English. Church officers attuned for any length of time to *Ordained Servant* hardly need another reminder of the importance of reading good literature. Yet, Gamble's collection fills a serious lacuna. I would venture that a fair number of authors in this collection are unfamiliar to many, or at least these works and or selections actually have not been read before. Listening closely to all these voices across time on what it means to be an educated human being—even those with which one disagrees—can sharpen one's ability to discern what is most suitable for Christians to teach. Church officers would do well to spend some time with this valuable collection, if they have not done so already in the years since its initial publication.

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ServantReading

The Good, the True, the Beautiful: A Multidisciplinary Tribute to Dr. David K. Naugle

By William Edgar

The Good, the True, the Beautiful: A Multidisciplinary Tribute to Dr. David K. Naugle, eds. Mark J. Boone, Rose M. Cothren, Kevin C. Neece, Jaclyn S. Parrish. Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2021, $41.00.

I had the pleasure of spending a few days with Dr. Naugle a few years ago at Dallas Baptist University. It was immediately apparent how much he loved the students and how much they loved him. His colleagues placed him in high regard. His book *Worldview: The History of a Concept*[1] had been required reading for my courses at seminary. It is fitting that this tribute volume, *The Good, the True, the Beautiful*, be composed of appreciative essays from Naugle's students, friends, and colleagues.

There can be no more meaningful experience in the professor's life than to see his students carrying the ball down the field and developing their own voices. David Naugle can only be proud of his extraordinary legacy. Knowing him, it is not an unhealthy pride but a sense of satisfaction. His view of vocation, at the center of his teaching, affirms that it is God who calls, and we are mere agents, "ambassadors" of his plan to bring the kingdom forward to this world.

The book is a feast. As one commentator put it, "It's a book about everything." That is about right. Subjects include apologetics, Russia, contemporary Christian music, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Wilberforce, and much more. The obvious strength of the volume is its comprehensive scope. Though in *Worldview* we have a primarily philosophical etymology, with due deference to Augustine, Calvin, Kuyper, Husserl, Jaspers, and a host of other philosophers, here we have the wide variety of subjects we might expect from such an eclectic collection of scholars. The legitimate fear of too much variety, often characteristic of a festschrift without a unifying theme, is offset by the surprising depth of each chapter.

We don't have the space to review every chapter. So, here are three, one from each section, for the sake of sampling. First, from "Part I: The Good," "An Exploration of Calling: William Wilberforce. Julia Sass and Me," by Hannah Briscoe (MLitt from the University of St Andrews). Calling is central to David Naugle's concerns, which has perceptively influenced Miss Briscoe. She pays homage to Os Guinness's powerful book,

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[1] David K. Naugle, *Worldview: The History of a Concept* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

The Call.[2] William Wilberforce is an obvious choice of a model. Less obviously, Julia Sass, missionary to Sierra Leon, receives the bulk of Brisoe's attention. The parallels as well as the contrasts are poignant. They both keenly felt the compelling voice of God's calling. Wilberforce was well-connected and served in public life. Together with influential colleagues and especially with the Clapham group, he pressed for the end of slavery and the "reformation of morals" in the British Empire. By contrast, Sass had a strongly independent spirit and often fought alone. She created a girls' school and was a strong advocate for women's education as well as for women's roles in missions. The story is moving. With some hesitation Sass became a missionary over the objections of her mother. She battled all kinds of obstacles, including bad health, on the way to success. Though she occasionally dipped into class prejudice, this was not uncommon for the times.

Briscoe credits Wilberforce and his mentor John Newton with the founding of the Christian Missionary Society (originally called The Society for Missions to Africa and the East). Sass and Wilberforce were personally connected through John Venn one of the founders of the CMS. Much of this article is based on Sass's correspondence with John's son, Henry Venn, to whom she bared her soul. Briscoe reverently draws on this correspondence which reveals a determined woman, who nevertheless has severe illnesses and much psychological anguish. Far from a historical study with a cold recital of facts, Briscoe inspiringly describes her own journey in the light of Sass's.

Second, "Part II: The True," by Scott Shiffer (Criswell College), "An Alternative to Plantinga's Free Will Defense." There is no doubt that Alvin Plantinga changed the face of philosophy in the West. In his famous response to John Mackie's works, which argued that there was a fundamental contradiction between an all-powerful and good God and the existence of evil, Plantinga painstakingly showed that this is only true if Mackie's premises are right. And they could be challenged. Plantinga's arguments closely resemble the older concept of middle knowledge. Though God knows all things he does not determine human choice. His plan includes the reality of human choice but does not obviate it. So, in one sense he must create a world where sin is a part.

Shiffer argues that this view softens God's sovereignty as well as his goodness. Using numerous Scriptural proof texts, he affirms an immutable, holy, and truthful God, but also one who is incapable of compromising with sin. Though he does not use it, his view accords with the Westminster Confession of Faith's affirmation that God ordains all things yet without being the author of sin (WCF 3.1). He rightly ponders why God created a world in which evil could exist. But he speculatively (in my view) proposes that this situation better opens the way to redemption. Thus, while Shiffer's approach is an improvement over Plantinga's, he never quite recognizes that God's reasons for allowing the fall must remain inscrutable.

Third, "Part 3: The Beautiful," by Episcopal priest David Dallas Miller, "Evangelism Through Beauty." This intriguing essay argues that by emphasizing the good and the true evangelists have missed the most compelling reason to embrace the gospel: its beauty. He defends this view mostly by citing testimonies of those who came to the gospel through beauty. They include Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger, a Jew who was converted to the

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[2] Os Guinness, *The Call: Finding and Fulfilling God's Purpose for Your Life* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998).

Christian faith not so much through the Word but because of the beauty of Notre Dame Cathedral. He includes C. S. Lewis, who came to faith through the experience of joy, but not so much through intellectual persuasion nor the moral argument. Miller ventures into the New Testament and contends that Jesus won people over by beauty more than logic. He contrasts the beauty of the raging sea with the greater beauty of the Lord rising to calm the waves. Even the cross becomes a beautiful thing.

As a complement or even a corrective to imbalance, Miller's view has a certain appeal. Protestants in particular, by stressing the ideational, have downplayed the aesthetic. But as a complete thesis, I find his emphasis lacks equilibrium. And I find some of his evidence disputable. John Frame once wisely said the two happiest words in theology are "not only." If Miller were saying not only goodness and truth but also beauty, we would listen more closely to him. He is aware of the possible imbalance, but slouches into excess. If one looks closely at C. S. Lewis's story it is impossible to miss the intellectual component and the power of the moral argument. And the New Testament is replete with claims of the truth. John 17:17 is resolute: "Your Word is truth."

The other issue I have with this essay is that the author never actually defines beauty. Of course, the word is famously elusive. But many have taken a stab at it and often convincingly. And Miller seems unaware of Calvin Seerveld's critique of the carelessness with which the term is thrown around, often sounding more like Plato than the Bible.

Having said all of that, the great virtue of this and all the other chapters in the book is that they exist. I do not mean to sound supercilious. I sincerely applaud the wide range of these essays, all of them inspired by the central notion of calling, which David Naugle has so masterfully imparted to his students and friends.

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ServantPoetry

A Hymn to the Evening

By Phillis Wheatley (1753?–1784)

Soon as the sun forsook the eastern main
The pealing thunder shook the heav’nly plain;
Majestic grandeur! From the zephyr’s wing,
Exhales the incense of the blooming spring.
Soft purl the streams, the birds renew their notes,
And through the air their mingled music floats.
Through all the heav’ns what beauteous dies are spread!
But the west glories in the deepest red:
So may our breasts with ev’ry virtue glow,
The living temples of our God below!
Fill’d with the praise of him who gives the light,
And draws the sable curtains of the night,
Let placid slumbers sooth each weary mind,
At morn to wake more heav’nly, more refin’d;
So shall the labours of the day begin
More pure, more guarded from the snares of sin.
Night's leaden sceptre seals my drowsy eyes,
Then cease, my song, till fair *Aurora* rise.